# POLICY & PRACTICE

## Paxil Settlement

The pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline has agreed to settle a class action lawsuit that alleged that the company inappropriately promoted the antidepressant Paxil to children. The $63.8 million settlement will include any individuals in the United States who bought Paxil or Paxil CR for their minor child. GlaxoSmithKline agreed to settle the case in order to avoid "protracted litigation" but officials there believe they acted appropriately, company spokeswoman Mary Anne Rhyne said. The settlement agreement is expected to receive final court approval in March 2007.

## New Children's Ad Guidelines

Advertisers have adopted an updated set of voluntary guidelines that spell out appropriate conduct in advertising to children under age 12. The guidelines were produced by the Children's Advertising Review Unit, which is administered by the Council of Better Business Bureaus and is funded by the children's advertising industry. The guidelines include directives on avoiding deceptive practices, avoiding misleading product representations and claims, and making disclaimers understandable, and also restrictions on celebrity endorsements, and prohibitions on blurring the line between advertising and program content, among others. For example, the guidelines prohibit the use of program personalities to advertise products or services adjacent to a TV program aimed at children under age 12 in which the same person or character appears. The guidelines also tackle the responsible advertising of food products. Under the guidelines, advertisers depicting food products must show the food in the context of a nutritionally balanced meal and snack foods should not be shown as substitutes for meals. The voluntary program applies to national advertising directed at children under age 12 years and online data collection targeting children under age 13 years. The guidelines are available at www.caru.org/guidelines/guidelines.pdf.

## Misusing Rx Pain Relievers

More people are misusing prescription pain relievers for the first time than are trying marijuana, according to a report from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. About 2.7 million individuals aged 12 years and older reported misuse of prescription pain relievers in the past year, compared with 2.1 million who said they started using marijuana in the last year. The figures on based on the combined results of the 2002 and 2004 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. Overall, marijuana users are still outpacing prescription drug abusers. An annual average of about 11.3 million individuals aged 12 years and older reported using prescription pain medications nonmedically in the past year, compared with an average of 25.5 million individuals who had used marijuana in the past year. "While marijuana continues to be the most commonly used illicit drug, the misuse of prescription drugs is clearly a growing national concern," said Eric Broderick, SAMHSA acting deputy administrator. The report is available online at http://oas.samhsa.gov/prescription/toc.htm.

## Price Tag for Teen Births

The public cost of teenage births was more than $9 billion in 2004, according to an estimate of costs to federal, state, and local governments for all births to women aged 19 years and younger prepared by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. The estimate includes increases in public sector health care costs for the baby, increased child welfare payments and other public assistance, increased costs to state prisons for the children of teen mothers, and lost revenue because of lower taxes paid by parents and the children over their adult lifetimes. The highest costs are for births to mothers 17 years and younger—about $8.6 billion in 2004. Overall, between 1991 and 2004, the researchers estimate that the public cost of teen births was about $161 billion.

## Investigating SSRIs and Suicide

Officials at the National Institute of Mental Health, part of the National Institutes of Health, are funding new research to help answer questions about the association between selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and suicidality. The projects, which will be conducted at academic medical centers across the country, will draw on data from the Food and Drug Administration, the Department of Veterans Affairs, Medicare, and the National Death Index. In one study being conducted at the University of Florida, researchers will examine whether an "activation syndrome" exists among certain young people that is brought on by SSRIs and can lead to suicidality. "These new, multiyear projects will clarify the connection between SSRI use and suicidality," Dr. Thomas Insel, director of the National Institute of Mental Health, said in a statement.

**—Mary Ellen Schneider**