

STUDY CITES NEED FOR THERAPY**Miami Herald, The (FL) - August 9, 2006****Author:** LINDA A. JOHNSON, *Associated Press*

A huge study found that patients on antidepressants rarely get the psychiatric therapy needed right after they start the drugs, a time when risk of suicidal behavior can rise temporarily.

Two-thirds of children and even more adults did not see a doctor or therapist for mental health care once within a month of beginning drug treatment, according to the study by Medco Health Solutions Inc., which manages prescription benefits for health plans.

Experts suggest the cost of therapy, a lack of follow-up by busy family doctors and a shortage of psychiatrists in some regions might help explain the problem.

Medco's study of 79,488 adults and 5,026 youngsters reviewed prescription and doctor visit records from July 2001 through September 2003. That was before the government urged drug makers to put warnings on their products calling for close monitoring of suicidal thoughts or violent behavior in the early weeks after starting the drugs.

"Many of these people probably should have had more follow-up than they did, regardless of the FDA guidelines," said Dr. Glen Stettin of Franklin Lakes-based Medco, which paid for the study.

In early 2004, the Food and Drug Administration recommended that new antidepressant users see a doctor once a week for the first month and three more times in the following two months.

The Medco study looked at treatment through the first three months and found that more than half the children and three-quarters of adults still had not had a mental health visit. Fewer than 15 percent of patients got all the treatment the FDA recommends in the first month, according to the study, published in this month's *American Journal of Managed Care*.

Dr. Darrel Regier, the American Psychiatric Association's director of research, said that carrying out the FDA recommendations would push up costs more than 50 percent.

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