

Illinois Department of  
**DCFS**  
Children & Family Services

Bruce Rauner  
Governor

Cynthia L. Tate, Ph.D.  
Interim Director

---

**Prescribing Psychotropic Medication to Young Children (Under age 6) under Illinois State Guardianship**

January 26, 2015

Dear Illinois Providers,

The purpose of this letter is to inform you about new guidelines for prescribing psychotropic medication to young children (under age 6). These guidelines were developed for young children who are under state guardianship (IDCFS) using current literature to update the article entitled, "Psychopharmacological Treatment for Very Young Children: Contexts and Guidelines."<sup>1</sup> The attached schematic details the process for IDCFS children. However, the principals and best practice guidelines apply broadly to young children across systems who are struggling with mental health concerns that might require psychotropic medication.

This new requirement is one of several resulting from Illinois' participation in a three-year quality assurance initiative to improve psychotropic medication prescribing for and management of children and youth in foster care. The initiative is sponsored by The Center for Health Care Strategies, Inc. (CHCS), with funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF). Illinois' state team is a partnership between Healthcare and Family Services (HFS), the state Medicaid agency; Department of Human Services - Division of Mental Health (DHS-DMH), the state mental health agency; the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the state child welfare agency and the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) Clinical Services in Psychopharmacology Program. One of the Illinois project goals is to assure the appropriateness of requests for psychotropic medication among young children under state guardianship.

Background

Concerns have been raised about the percentage of foster children on psychotropic medications, the number and dosages of medications prescribed, and the ages of the children receiving these medications.<sup>2</sup> The effect of psychotropic medication on the brain development of young children has not been systematically studied, but current research suggests that early exposure, in the first 3 years of life, can permanently alter the development of neurotransmitter systems.<sup>3</sup> Given the limited knowledge about the impact of psychotropic medication on young children's developing brains, the fact that young children are more sensitive to side effects than older, larger children, and that foster children are prescribed more of these medications, new guidelines have been developed for prescribing psychotropic medication to young children. These guidelines will be used to inform consent for the prescription of psychotropic medication to young children who are under Illinois state guardianship. These guidelines can be used for prescribing psychotropic medication to any child under age 6.

*Debra Dyer-Webster, Esq.*

*Guardian/Deputy Director*

---

<sup>1</sup> Gleason MM, Egger HL, Emslie GJ, et al. (2007). J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry; 46:1532-1572.

<sup>2</sup> US Governmental Accountability Office (2011). Foster Children: HHS Guidance Could Help States Improve Oversight of Psychotropic Prescriptions. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/590/586906.pdf>, accessed January 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Fanton J, Gleason MM. (2009). Psychopharmacology of preschoolers: A Critical Review of Current Conditions. J Child Adolesc Psychiatr Clin N Am.; 18(3):753-71.

**Office of the Guardian**  
17 N State Street, 7th Floor • Chicago, Illinois 60602  
312-814-8600 • 312-793-3546 Fax  
[www.DCFS.illinois.gov](http://www.DCFS.illinois.gov)