**Antidepressant use on rise at Canadian universities**

[**CBC News**](http://www.cbc.ca/news/credit.html) **Posted: Nov 9, 2012 5:17 PM ET Last Updated: Nov 10, 2012 10:10 AM ET**

Over the past 10 years, Canadian post-secondary students’ antidepressant drug use has increased to the point where at many institutions, it has eclipsed birth control pills.

"We’re still seeing that that class of medications is almost always the No. 1 category,” said Lev Bukhman, director of Studentcare Networks, the largest student health insurer in the country.

“Sometimes it’s number two with oral contraceptives, but certainly there’s been a great deal of growth over the past decade in the use of these medications,” he said.

At the University of Ottawa, oral contraceptives remain the No. 1 prescription drug claim amongst students, but antidepressant use is a strong second, and rising.

### U of O students claimed $119,049 for antidepressants in 2011

In 2011, U of O students claimed $119,049 worth of antidepressants, a slight increase compared to the previous year and more than drugs for skin disorders, attention deficit disorders and antibiotics combined.

Ann-Marie Roy, vice-president of communications for the university’s student federation, puts the blame for increasing antidepressant use on the high cost of tuition.

Visits to the university food bank are on the rise, said Roy, and many students are working as much as, and even more than, the time they spend in the classroom or studying.

“I think financial stress is a big reason for students relying on antidepressants a little bit more over the last few years,” Roy said. “Students are working several part-time jobs while going to school and sometimes it’s not enough … it’s evident that financial stress is the root cause of a lot of the stress students face."

### Tuition fees not the only cause, student service director says

Murray Sang, director of the U of O's Student Academic Success Service, acknowledges the cost of post-secondary education can create stress and anxiety, but argues it’s only one of several contributing factors.

“To equate tuition fees as the sole cause, the primary cause of mental health issues in students, that’s not right,” said Sang. “That’s an oversimplification and certainly not the reality and the research doesn’t back that up.”

The de-stigmatization of mental health problems has led to more people seeking help and the result is more diagnoses and a subsequent increase in antidepressant drug use, Sang said.

Last year, U of O students visited campus counsellors more than 7,000 times, he said. He thinks part of the problem is that the current generation of young scholars are often ill prepared to deal with life’s ups and downs.

“The transition to university is more challenging and students are not prepared with the resiliency,” said Sang. “So when obstacles arise and things go wrong in their academic studies that they have the fortitude and resiliency to overcome those problems.”

Bukhman, whose Studentcare Networks manage 600,000 student policies, suggests post-secondary institutions invest as much in fostering a better campus community as they do to construct bigger and better facilities.

“(There’s) not the same level of resources to provide the ongoing institutional and community support to build a campus community where people have the support and the emotional help they need to go through the university experience,” said Bukhman.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:**

**There are a couple of suggestions in this article that attempt to explain the rising use of antidepressants by Canadian university students. That’s “future you”, folks.**

1. **What are YOUR theories? What are the reasons behind your theories?**
2. **Do you believe that this is an actual problem, or even newsworthy? Explain yourself clearly, please. Take into account the potential short-term AND long-term implications, if you think there are any.**

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