

**Colleges Can't Be Caretakers**  
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I was a senior in high school in 1979, about to graduate and leave home for college. There were, I'm sure, a lot of things my parents wanted to tell me, to make sure I knew and understood before I took that next step, but they managed to distill down to two tasks all the wisdom they felt necessary to pass along: doing my laundry and checking the fluids in my cool-but-unreliable '71 Triumph Spitfire. I remember my mother explaining the need to separate lights from darks, when to use hot water, when to use cold, and why detergent really *was* necessary. I remember my father explaining that the engine should be running when checking the transmission fluid.

I'm now the Dean of Students at the University of Connecticut, and I imagine that many of my students arrive here in Storrs for their freshman year having had similar lessons in the previous months. Most parents wouldn't dream of sending their children to college without some basic skills. In addition to laundry, most of our students can use an ATM card. They can floss their teeth. They can set an alarm clock (when they remember to do so). These are all necessary skills, not just for college students, but for adults.

I have become discouraged, though, at one set of lessons that seems to have been left out of the life curriculum imparted by parents, with predictably dire results. Too many students have not learned to manage their medication.

If our students are typical of the national average, and I have no reason to believe they're not, then it is likely that somewhere between a quarter and a third of them arrive in Storrs with some sort of prescription medication. Sometimes it's for a chronic medical condition, sometimes for learning-related disorders, and quite often, for an emotional or psychological condition. Depression, anxiety, bipolar disorders, attention deficit: all of these are common diagnoses among my students. Many of them have been on medication for years. But it's not a stretch to say that they are better at doing their laundry than managing their meds.

Think about it: for a year, or three or five years—however long they've been taking their Zoloft, Paxil, Adderall, Abilify—it has usually been a parent responsible for placing the pills in front of them at breakfast, for remembering to refill the prescription, for noticing the side effects and counteracting them in some way. But college freshmen often don't eat breakfast. They sleep till noon if they don't have classes. Their rooms are piled high with clothes, books, computer hardware. The lives their parents have helped keep in some order are now their own, and the order just isn't there.

While some students intentionally choose to stop their medication for what I consider developmentally-appropriate reasons (they want to know who they are without their meds, they don't want to be different from their peers, ironic as that seems when many of their peers are also on medication), others stop because they forget, or they can't find them, or they neglect to get a refill. Some students end up doing fine. Others begin the inevitable downward slide to crisis—academic and emotional (though the two are often so closely linked as to be indistinguishable).

I'll often get a call from a panicked parent who says, "My daughter" (though it can be a son as well) "was doing fine till a few weeks ago, but just told me that she hasn't been to class in three weeks and can't seem to get out of bed. She is afraid she's going to

fail her classes. What should I do?" We then have a conversation about the options offered by the University for a student in crisis, and I end by strongly encouraging the parent to encourage the student to seek assistance at our Counseling Center. This, though, is a short-term solution. We have an eight-session limit for students in need of counseling, inadequate for many students suffering from the serious psychological disorders so prevalent among students today.

I know there is a long list of topics parents want to cover with their soon-to-be college student. This is one that should be at the top of that list. If your child takes medication for any condition, please make sure that she or he is capable of managing this responsibility. Please talk with your student about the implications of ceasing to take medication. I fully support students who make that *informed* choice, but remind them in my conversations with them, "Your choices--your consequences. If your medication is necessary for you to succeed academically, and you stop taking it, you might need to take time off from school to see how it goes. Or you should keep taking them till you graduate, and then decide what you want to do."

I would rather have that conversation than the one I have too often with parents, in which I say, "Your student isn't ready to be at UConn. Please come get him." The financial and emotional costs of such a situation, for both students and their parents, are profound.