

Pharma's Role in Creating Diagnostic Yardsticks

This document outlines major examples where the pharmaceutical industry or aligned experts helped create or influence diagnostic screening tools and thresholds (the “yardsticks”) used by clinicians. In each case, these tools expanded disease definitions, created larger patient populations, and directly benefited drug markets. References are included at the end.

ADHD & Stimulants (Conners Rating Scale)

- Created by Dr. C. Keith Conners in 1969 as a tool to measure hyperactivity in children.
- Used primarily to track response to Ritalin (methylphenidate), supplied by Ciba-Geigy.
- Helped medicalize ADHD and expand stimulant prescribing.

Cholesterol & Statins

- National Cholesterol Education Program (ATP I–III) set LDL cutoffs.
- Panels had widespread financial ties to statin makers (Merck, Pfizer, AstraZeneca).
- Lower thresholds expanded statin market to tens of millions.

Osteoporosis & Bone Density

- WHO 1994 panel set T-score cutoffs for osteopenia/osteoporosis.
- Panelists had ties to bisphosphonate makers (Merck's Fosamax) and DEXA machine companies.
- Suddenly, ~50% of postmenopausal women classified as 'at risk.'

Depression & Anxiety (PHQ-9, GAD-7)

- Both tools co-developed with Pfizer funding.
- Promoted in primary care alongside Zoloft and Effexor XR.
- Screening expansion drove antidepressant prescribing.

Hypertension & Blood Pressure

- Cutoff for 'hypertension' dropped from $\geq 160/100$ to $\geq 130/80$ over decades.
- Guideline committees often tied to drug makers (Novartis, Pfizer, Merck).
- Each drop brought millions more into medication range.

Pain & Opioids

- Numeric Pain Scale and 'Pain as the 5th Vital Sign' promoted in 1990s.
- Heavily backed by Purdue Pharma (OxyContin) and Janssen.
- Mandated pain scoring normalized widespread opioid prescribing.

Prediabetes/Diabetes (HbA1c)

- HbA1c $\geq 6.5\%$ defined as diabetes; 5.7–6.4% as 'prediabetes.'
- ADA panels included members tied to companies selling insulin, GLP-1s, SGLT2 inhibitors.
- Created massive new drug markets by expanding diagnosis.

References

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