

HEALTH & SAFETY: PSYCHIATRIC MEDICATIONS

“Atypical Antipsychotics”

BQIS/Outreach Fact Sheets provide a general overview on topics important to supporting an individual’s health and safety and to improving their quality of life. This is the first of six Fact Sheets regarding Psychotropic Medications.

Objectives

Individuals will understand why atypical antipsychotics are prescribed, how they work, common side effects, occasional side effects, occasional but serious side effects, unusual but serious side effects, how the physician monitors these medicines, and the actions needed to support someone on these medications.

Definitions

Atypical Antipsychotics: medications used to decrease mood swings, psychosis, mania, severe aggression, depression, agitation, or tics. They are commonly used instead of typical antipsychotics because of less severe side effects. Atypical antipsychotics include Clozapine (Clozaril), Zyprexa (Olanzapine), Risperdal (Risperidone), Invega (Paliperidone), Seroquel (Quetiapine), Abilify (Aripiprazole), and Geodon (Ziprasidone).

Psychosis: a symptom or feature of mental illness typically characterized by radical changes in personality, impaired functioning, and a distorted or nonexistent sense of objective reality.

Mania: an abnormally happy mental state, typically characterized by exaggerated feelings of happiness, lack of inhibitions, racing thoughts, diminished need for sleep, talkativeness, risk taking, and irritability.

Tic: an involuntary, compulsive, rapid, repetitive, stereotyped movement or vocalization.

Insomnia: the inability to obtain an adequate amount or quality of sleep.

Depression: a mental state characterized by sad feelings of gloom and inadequacy.

Facts

- Atypical Antipsychotics are available in:
 - Liquid
 - Tablets
 - Rapid-disintegrating tablets
 - Long-acting and short-acting injections (Depending on the medication prescribed)

- These medicines work by:
 - Decreasing mood swings
 - Decreasing depression
 - Decreasing mania
 - Decreasing severe aggressive outbursts
 - Decreasing psychosis
 - Decreasing agitation
 - Decreasing tics
- Common side effects include:
 - Dry mouth
 - Weight gain
 - Sedation or insomnia
 - Sunburn when exposed to the sun
 - Gastro-intestinal upset
- Occasional side effects (call the physician within one week):
 - Drooling
 - Inability to sit still or restlessness
 - Slowing of movements with a decrease in facial expressions
 - Sexual dysfunction
 - Menstrual cycle abnormalities
 - Enlargement of the breasts or breast discharge in men or women
- Occasional but serious side effects (call the physician immediately):
 - Stiffness or muscle spasms in the tongue, jaw, or neck
 - Seizures
 - Increased thirst and urination
- Very rare but extremely serious side effects (Need to go to the ER immediately):
 - Stiffness, fever and confusion
 - Stiffness without breathing or swallowing
- How the physician monitors these medicines:
 - Blood test yearly to measure blood sugar and fasting lipid panel (these medications can increase cholesterol and blood sugar)
 - Abnormal Involuntary Movement Scale (AIMS) to check the face, arms, legs, neck, shoulder, and hips for any abnormal movements
 - Weight and abdominal circumference

Recommended Actions and Prevention Strategies

1. Administer medications as prescribed
2. Watch for anything different/change in status about the person and for signs of side effects
3. Document noted signs and symptoms of side effects of medications and changes in status of the person
4. Communicate noted signs and symptoms of side effects of medications and changes in status of the person to supervisor/nurse immediately
5. Seek medical attention as indicated according to the seriousness of symptoms as listed above
6. Monitor for effectiveness of medication by documenting target behavior data that relate to diagnosis
7. Ensure AIMS is completed and results of AIM and other data including weight is presented to physician/psychiatrist during scheduled appointments

Learning Assessment

Questions that can be used to verify a person's competency in the material contained in this Fact Sheet:

1. Atypical antipsychotics are used to decrease:
 - A. Depression
 - B. Mania
 - C. Mood swings
 - D. All of the above
2. Common side effects of atypical antipsychotics include all of the following except:
 - A. Weight gain
 - B. GI upset
 - C. Seizures
 - D. Sedation
3. Occasional side effects include:
 - A. Weight gain
 - B. Drooling
 - C. Restlessness
 - D. B and C
4. Physician monitoring of atypical antipsychotics include blood work for:
 - A. Blood sugar
 - B. Thyroid function
 - C. Blood count
 - D. Liver function
5. To help monitor the condition of someone receiving an antipsychotic medication, it is important to do all of the following except:
 - A. Watch for any changes in the person.
 - B. Document observations of possible side effects of medications.
 - C. Report to your supervisor how the person is doing every other month.
 - D. Take target behavior and weight data to medical appointments for the physician/psychiatrist's review.

References

Dulcan MK (editor). Helping Parents, Youth, and Teachers Understand Medications for Behavioral and Emotional Problems: A Resource Book of Medication Information Handouts, Third Edition. Washington, DC, American Psychiatric Publishing, 2007

Stahl SM. Essential Psychopharmacology: The Prescriber's Guide. Cambridge, UK, The Press Syndicate of The University of Cambridge, 2005

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Related Resources

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry www.aacap.org/cs/forFamilies

National Institute of Mental Health nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/mental-health-medications/complete-index.shtml

Psychiatric Medication Series Fact Sheets: "Typical Antipsychotics", "Depakote", "Lithium", "SSRIs and SNRIs", and "Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome"

Learning Assessment Answers

1. D
2. C
3. D
4. A
5. C

Outreach Services

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