

HEALTH & SAFETY: PSYCHIATRIC MEDICATIONS

“Clozapine (Clozaril/FazaClo)”

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 seventh of ten Fact Sheets regarding Psychotropic Medications.

Objectives

Individuals will understand why Clozapine is prescribed, how it works, common side effects, occasional side effects, occasional but serious side effects, unusual but serious side effects, how the physician monitors this medicine and the actions needed to support someone on these medications.

Definitions

Clozapine: A medication used to treat psychosis, mania, severe aggression, or severe depression. This medication is used to treat these disorders when other medications have failed.

Facts

- Clozapine is available in:
 - Tablets and rapid-disintegrating tablets
- This medicine works by:
 - Decreasing mood swings.
 - Decreasing depression.
 - Decreasing mania.
 - Decreasing severe aggressive outbursts.
 - Decreasing psychosis
 - Decreasing agitations
- Common side effects include:
 - Sedation
 - Dry mouth
 - Weight gain/ Increased appetite

- Dizziness
- GI 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
- 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
 - Fever, chills, sore throat, skin bruising or small spots (this medication can rarely cause a life threatening decrease in the number of white blood cells)
 - Tired all the time, changes in breathing, rapid heartbeat and/or chest pain (this medication can rarely cause heart problems)
- How the physician monitors this medicine:
 - Blood test to measure blood counts.
 - 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 and symptoms of side effects of medications
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 according to the seriousness of symptoms as listed above or per agency policy
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. Clozapine used to decrease:
 - A. Depression
 - B. Mania
 - C. Psychosis
 - D. All of the above
2. Common side effects of Clozapine include all of the following except:
 - A. Weight gain
 - B. GI upset
 - C. Weight loss
 - D. Sedation
3. Occasional side effects include:
 - A. Weight gain
 - B. Drooling
 - C. Restlessness
 - D. B and C
4. Physician monitoring of Clozapine include blood work for:
 - A. Blood sugar
 - B. Thyroid function
 - C. Blood count
 - D. Liver function
3. 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

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, AmericanPsychiatric Publishing, 2007
- Stahl SM. Essential Psychopharmacology: The Prescriber's Guide. Cambridge, UK, The Press Syndicate of The University of Cambridge, 2005

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

Learning Assessment Answers

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

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