

Managing Side Effects of Psychotropic Drugs.

Oyewumi LK, de Wit R. Zxmaxx Communications, London, Ontario, 1998.

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Managing Side Effects of Psychotropic Drugs is a reference handbook whose objective is to assist clinicians, health-care providers, patients, and families in identifying and managing the side effects that occur with psychotropic drug treatment.

The first chapter provides a general overview of psychotropic drugs. The drugs are grouped by classes, and some comparison data (such as dose equivalencies between antipsychotic drugs) are given. The pharmacology of psychotropic drugs is explained in basic terms, as are the principles of pharmacokinetics and drug interactions. These sections would be particularly helpful to nonphysician and nonpharmacist readers.

Chapter 2 provides the background to the text and sets the stage for the book's contents; it defines and classifies side effects into physical and behavioural components, gives epidemiological data, and describes factors that predispose a patient to side effects. It discusses the problems of identifying the true prevalence of side effects through double-blind studies and postmarketing surveillance programs.

The side effects that have been reported for psychotropic drugs are extensively described in chapter 3. The format for each side effect is specified at the beginning of the chapter and is followed relatively consistently throughout. This format includes name of the side effect, prevalence, incidence (if known), occurrence, presentation, mechanism of action (where known or theorized), predisposing factors (where known), and commonly associated drugs (which lists "specific drugs or class of drugs commonly linked to the identified side effect, in order of importance"). The inclusion of both prevalence and incidence seems unnecessary, as data for incidence are rarely provided in the text.

Side effects are divided into (i) physical, medical, and somatic effects, and (ii) psychiatric and behavioural

effects, and are listed alphabetically by body organ or system. These sections are further subdivided into specific subsections, for example, hematological, which includes agranulocytosis, aplastic anemia, and coagulation disorders, among others. This chapter offers definitions of terms such as allergy, hypersensitivity, and idiosyncrasy and gives a description of specific side effects, such as lichen planus, which may help the clinician in diagnosis.

The two headings that I felt might be subject to misinterpretation in this chapter are "Prevalence" and "Commonly Associated Drugs". For example, for arrhythmias and conduction disorders, the prevalence is listed as 5% to 10% and among the commonly associated drugs, the authors list thioridazine, other low-potency antipsychotics, and risperidone. It is unclear why the antipsychotics clozapine and pimozide, which pose higher risks than risperidone, are not specifically mentioned. The reader might assume that all the drugs listed under this heading have a prevalence risk of 5% to 10%. Earlier in this section, however, risperidone is stated to "rarely cause cardiac arrhythmia and atrioventricular (A-V) nodal block". Such inconsistencies can give a false impression of the risks of a specific drug for a side effect. Another example of this is in the section on acne, where a prevalence of 5% is suggested and commonly associated drugs mentioned include lithium, carbamazepine, and valproate compounds, as well as haloperidol, drugs with very different rates of producing acne. By trying to group data the authors have made it difficult for the reader to determine the true prevalence of a particular side effect. It would be of greater benefit to clinicians to list different prevalence rates for different drugs.

A number of tables are included in chapter 3. Four of these compare side effect profiles of selected antipsychotics and antidepressants. One table provides

general information on the risks of psychotropic drug therapy in pregnancy, and another gives examples of drugs that affect metabolizing enzyme activity.

Chapter 4 describes methods of evaluating and documenting the side effects of psychotropic drugs, and compares side effect rating scales in table form. It also lists some adjunctive investigative methods to confirm specific side effects, for example, bone marrow biopsy for aplastic anemia.

The management of side effects of psychotropic drugs is discussed in Chapter 5. The introduction to this chapter offers clinical pearls in treating side effects. This chapter is a companion to chapter 3 and lists the side effect categories in the same order (alphabetically by body organ or system); this consistency makes it easier for the clinician to go back and forth between these 2 chapters.

Treatment suggestions may include risk factors, dosing considerations, and drug changes, as well as specific nonpharmacological or pharmacological strategies. Tables are provided for certain treatments, such as for constipation, urinary incontinence, and hesitation. Suggestions are not specifically referenced in this chapter, but in chapter 9 there is an extensive bibliography for this section.

Chapter 6 discusses the consequences of psychotropic side effects and the impact of adverse effects on the physician's assessment of treatment benefits, drug compliance, the patient's psychomotor functioning, self-image, self-esteem, and physical and health risks, as well as medicolegal and economic consequences. The benefits or clinical usefulness of certain side effects are also addressed.

Chapter 7 discusses sources of side effect information and the surveillance and reporting of medication side effects. Current guidelines for reporting adverse drug reactions are reviewed.

The psychodynamic and psychological aspects of side effects are reviewed in chapter 8, including the patient's perceptions of, interpretation of, response to, and tolerance of side effects.

The last chapter provides a bibliography and references on psychotropic side effects. References are listed by chapter and include both texts and journal articles. Recommended books include some older classics from the 1970s and 1980s, as well as more recent texts. References for chapters 3 and 5 are divided into specific clinical categories. An index is included at the end of the handbook.

This handbook is a thorough, well-organized, user-friendly reference text on the side effects of psychotropic drugs. It not only identifies side effects and provides treatment strategies, but it also gives the reader an understanding of the mechanisms, evaluation, monitoring, risks, and consequences of side effects. My concerns lie primarily with the presentation of drug-specific prevalence data in chapter 3, which may be subject to misinterpretation.

This handbook would be a valuable reference for physicians, pharmacists, and health-care providers working with people undergoing psychotropic drug therapy. Although the authors suggest it may be useful as a patient or caregiver manual, I feel that the information provided may be beyond the understanding of those without a health-care background.

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