

WA PSYCHOTROPIC DRUG COMMITTEE (WAPDC) ALERT

Antipsychotic polypharmacy and high dose prescribing

Position statement

Antipsychotic polypharmacy and high dose prescribing places patients at increased risk of associated metabolic, neuromuscular and cardiovascular side-effects. This practice also increases the risk of drug interactions, non-compliance and medication errors.

To reduce these risks prescribers of antipsychotics should ensure that their practice adheres to national and international guidelines and advice.^{1, 2, 3, 4}

Background

Globally studies have indicated that rates of unwarranted antipsychotic polypharmacy and high dose prescribing are unacceptably high.^{5, 6} Audits have indicated that these practices are particularly prevalent across a number of mental health settings in Western Australia.^{7, 8} The reasons for these trends are unclear and are at variance with limited evidence for the efficacy and safety of using multiple and high doses of antipsychotic medicines.

Consensus agreement

At the November 2015 WAPDC 'Current opinion in antipsychotic prescribing' discussion, medicines safety in mental health and antipsychotic polypharmacy and high dose prescribing were deliberated.⁹ The consensus opinion of the invited panel was that:

- *Prescribers should not routinely prescribe two or more antipsychotic medications concurrently.*
- *The use of more than one antipsychotic should be avoided except where there have been three failed trials of monotherapy which included one failed trial of clozapine where possible, or where a second antipsychotic medication is added with a plan to taper and cease the first antipsychotic.*

Health services are requested to:

Communicate this Alert to all personnel responsible for the prescription and management of antipsychotic medicines.

References:

1. https://www.ranzcp.org/Files/Resources/Publications/CPG/Clinician/CPG_Clinician_Full_Schizophrenia-pdf.aspx (Accessed March 2016)
2. <http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/conditions-and-diseases/mental-health-and-behavioural-conditions/psychosis-and-schizophrenia> (Accessed December 2015)
3. [The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines in Psychiatry, 12th Edition](#)
4. <http://www.choosingwisely.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/APA-Choosing-Wisely-List.pdf> (Accessed December 2015)
5. [Harrington M et al, the results of a multicentre audit of prescribing of antipsychotic drugs: Psychiatric bulletin 2002, 26:414-418](#)
6. [Freudenreich O et al, antipsychotic combination therapy in schizophrenia: Acta Psych Scand 2002; 106:323-30](#)
7. [Luft B, Schwartz D, Walker K. An audit of high-dose and combination antipsychotic](#)

- [prescribing in hospitalised patients. Proceedings of the National Conference of The Society for Hospital Pharmacists of Australia; 2013 Sep; Cairns, Queensland.](#)
8. [Bascombe S, Luft B, Emmott N, England M, Yee S. An audit of high-dose and antipsychotic Polypharmacy prescribing in community mental health clinics. \[poster abstract\] In: Book of Abstracts. The 40th Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia National Conference. Medicines Management 2014-Broaden your Horizons; 2014 Sept 11-14; Darwin,NT Poster Abstract 3](#)
 9. [e.g. 'https://www.youtube.com/watch?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?) 'Current opinion in antipsychotic prescribing' presentation and panel discussion