

HEALTH & SAFETY: PSYCHIATRIC MEDICATIONS

“Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome (NMS)”

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 sixth of ten Fact Sheets regarding Psychotropic Medications.

Objectives

Individuals will be knowledgeable of the signs and symptoms, causes, treatment and prognosis of neuroleptic malignant syndrome.

Definitions

Neuroleptic malignant syndrome: a life-threatening neurologic disorder caused by an adverse reaction to antipsychotic medication.

Facts

- Symptoms usually occur within the first two weeks of starting the medication
- The syndrome occurs more commonly at higher doses of antipsychotic medications.
- Examples of antipsychotic medications include but are not limited to Abilify (aripiprazole), Thorazine (chlorpromazine), Clozaril (clozapine), Prolixin (fluphenazine), Haldol (haloperidol), Loxatine (loxapine), Zyprexa (olanzapine), Trilafon (perphenazine) Orap (pimozide), Risperdal (Risperidone), and Geodon (Ziprasidone)
- Signs and symptoms of Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome include:
 - Rigidity (frequently the first symptom)
 - High fever (frequently the second symptom)
 - Sweating
 - Unstable blood pressure
 - Confusion
 - Agitation
 - Unconsciousness

- Signs and symptoms will:
 - Progress rapidly and peak in about three days
 - Last from eight hours to forty days
- Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome may be caused by:
 - Adverse reaction to an antipsychotic medication.
 - Rapid or large increases in antipsychotic medications
 - Abrupt discontinuation or reduction of anti-Parkinsonism drugs
- Individuals who are identified and treated early do much better.
- Prompt treatment can prevent fatalities

Recommended Actions and Prevention Strategies

1. Administer antipsychotropic medications as prescribed
2. Watch for signs and symptoms of neuroleptic malignant syndrome
3. If signs and symptoms of neuroleptic malignant syndrome are observed, hold antipsychotic medications and take the person to the Emergency Room immediately
4. Document noted signs and symptoms of neuroleptic malignant syndrome
5. Communicate noted signs and symptoms of neuroleptic malignant syndrome to supervisor/nurse after obtaining necessary emergency treatment for the person

Learning Assessment

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

1. Antipsychotic medications that can cause neuroleptic malignant syndrome include:
 - A. Haloperidol
 - B. Chlorpromazine
 - C. Aripiprazole
 - D. All of the above
2. Signs and symptoms of Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome include:
 - A. Muscle rigidity
 - B. Low body temperature
 - C. Seizures
 - D. Hair Loss
3. Treatment for Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome includes:
 - A. Staying at home
 - B. Going to the ER immediately
 - C. Stopping antipsychotic medication
 - D. B and C
4. Signs and symptoms of Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome last from:
 - A. Eight hours to forty days
 - B. Five minutes to eight hours
 - C. At least forty days
 - D. A life time

References

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

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Related Resources

Psychiatric Medication Series Fact Sheets: “Atypical Antipsychotics”, “Typical Antipsychotics”, “Depakote”, “Lithium”, and “SSRIs and SNRIs”

Learning Assessment Answers

1. D
2. A
3. D
4. A

Outreach Services

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