

GENERAL MEDICATION INFORMATION

AN OVERVIEW OF MEDICATION USE, EFFECTS, AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Types Of Medications Used In The Treatment Of Mental Illness:

1) Antidepressants

These medications work by increasing the effectiveness of the chemicals, called neurotransmitters, in the brain. There are several different classes, such as Tricyclic Antidepressants (TCA's), Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs), and Serotonin Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitors (SNRIs). Each class is associated with somewhat similar side effects. However, not everyone who takes the same medication will necessarily have the same side effects, if any at all.

Antidepressants generally take between 2-6 weeks to have full effectiveness. However, some symptoms of depression may respond in a few days to a week. It is very important to take your medication as prescribed without missing doses for the medication to be effective.

2) Antimanic Agents (Medications for Bipolar Disorder, also called Manic-Depressive Illness)

Antimanic agents are used to control the symptoms of both mania and depression. An antimanic will decrease a manic person's mood and will also increase a depressed mood. They work to manage the mood thermostat in the brain by regulating complex mechanisms in brain chemistry.

The three common mood stabilizers used are Lithium, Depakote[®] (Divalproex Sodium), and Tegretol[®] (Carbamazepine). These medications require periodic blood monitoring to adjust dose for maximum efficacy, while minimizing side effects and possible toxicity. These medications are associated with a specific concentration range within the blood. If the blood levels of the medication are too low, the drug may not be effective. If the blood levels are too high, they may become toxic to the person taking them.

3) Antianxiety Medications

The antianxiety medications are categorized into 2 groups: Benzodiazepine and Non-benzodiazepine. Benzodiazepines are drugs such as Xanax[®], Valium[®], Ativan[®], and Klonopin[®]. These medications were originally indicated for use only as needed for anxiety. There is some caution advised because of their addictive and possible abuse potential. Physical and psychological dependence is also a possibility with this group of medications. Today, there are non-addictive alternatives, such as Tricyclic Antidepressants, SSRIs, Atarax[®], Vistaril[®], Serzone[®], Remeron[®], and various others to control anxiety. A current advance in anxiety treatment is Buspar[®] (Buspirone), a drug which works at the serotonin receptor that modulates anxiety.

4) Antipsychotic Medications, also called *Neuroleptics* and *Major Tranquilizers*

These medications reduce or eliminate the condition known as Psychosis or the disease called Schizophrenia. They are used to treat hallucinations, paranoia, delusions, and bizarre thinking. They help a confused mind re-establish contact with reality. There are 2 groups of these medications: Typical Antipsychotics and newer Atypical Antipsychotics. Both groups are equally efficacious in the treatment of the most apparent signs of psychosis. The newer Atypical Antipsychotics, such as Seroquel[®], Risperdal[®], and Zyprexa[®] help with some of the depressive-like symptoms of schizophrenia and do so with less side effects. The Typical Antipsychotic agents, such as Thorazine[®], Haldol[®], Navane[®], Prolixin[®], Trilafon[®], and Mellaril[®] are generally much less expensive than the newer agents because they have been available for a longer period of time and are made generically. The newer agents can be somewhat more expensive, but are covered by most prescription plans.

5) Detox Medications

These medications help to reduce the withdrawal symptoms of certain abused drugs that the body has become dependent upon. Many withdrawals are not dangerous, but can be uncomfortable to the patient if not treated. Some withdrawals, such as from alcohol or benzodiazepines, can be very dangerous if not medically treated and supervised. Withdrawal regimens can be as short as a few days or as long as many months. Inpatient detox is performed rapidly due to the high level of patient monitoring.

“PRN” or “as needed” medications:

These medications are prescribed by the physician to be used on an “as needed” basis to treat conditions which may arise during treatment. An example of this is experiencing heartburn and receiving a liquid antacid from the nurse to treat this. Some “PRNs” can be requested by the patient to the medication nurse on duty. Others are given at the nurses' initiative. All “PRNs” are given at the nurse's discretion. This means that the nurse can refuse a patient a “PRN” if he or she deems it inappropriate or unnecessary.

Patient Responsibility for Medications:

- ✓ Know what medications are prescribed for you. You can request information at any time from the doctor, nurses, or pharmacist about your medication. Printed or photocopied drug information is available to you upon request.
- ✓ Understand the need for medication. You can discuss this with your physician, nurse, or pharmacist if you are unsure about your medication.
- ✓ Report any adverse effects to the physician, nurse, or pharmacist. Even if you consider it minor, it needs to be communicated. Minor or serious side effects can effect your long-term success with medication.
- ✓ Take your medication as prescribed. It is your right to refuse medication at any time. This may however interfere with your treatment at the hospital. Compliance with medications before and after discharge is very important to maintaining your mental health and well-being.