

04 - 3. The principles of rational prescribing of

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Watchful waiting: When treating conditions such as depression and anxiety, NICE recommends watchful waiting before pharmacological interventions.

Start-low go slow: Psychotropic medications should be prescribed at the lowest possible dose and for the minimum duration possible. If the expected improvement does not occur, the formulation and the management plan must be revised.

Therapeutic monitoring: Many psychotropics have dose-dependent therapeutic and side effects. Plasma monitoring can be useful in some circumstances (see therapeutic window phenomenon discussed later)

Metabolic monitoring: Metabolic side-effects arguably contribute to more days of life lost than any other adverse effects when taking psychotropics. Various classes of psychotropics have specific recommendations as to the frequency and extent of metabolic monitoring.

Response assessment: A good follow-up schedule is essential to monitor the effect of prescribed psychotropics. Without this, the purpose of pharmacological treatment will fail.

Avoiding polypharmacy: Most national guidelines explicitly recommend avoiding the combination of psychotropic agents, especially antipsychotics.

Informed consent: When prescribing, it is imperative that pros and cons of a treatment are discussed in advance to enable the patient to make an informed decision regarding the treatments offered.

Patient choice: Guidelines such as NICE recommends that patients must be supported to make the final choice of a specific psychotropic drug for an indication (e.g. antipsychotics for psychosis) from various options provided by the psychiatrist.

Off-label use: While off-label use of psychotropics for uncommon, non-specific indications is not recommended; this practice is not illegal per se in most countries. Such practices often have only flimsy or no evidence-based support. The prescriber must explain to the patient if the medication is being used outside its licensed indications and provide the available evidence to demonstrate its effectiveness.

CHEMISTRY & STORAGE

Drugs exposed to moisture and light can gain moisture quickly - reducing the availability of active excipients. This is termed as hygrophilicity. Some drugs are extremely sensitive to environmental moisture to such an extent that they will turn from crystalline states into pastes or liquids if left in contact with moist air even for a short period of time. A good example of this type of deliquescent

material is Sodium Valproate. This property is called as deliquescence.

© SPMM Course Long-term prescriptions: When treating chronic illnesses, relevant local & national guidelines should be followed. Information about which medications worked before and which did not should be noted, in addition to noting the adverse effects produced by each of them.

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