

Journal Watch

A pilot exploration of the antiemetic activity of olanzapine for the relief of nausea in patients with advanced cancer and pain.

Passik SD, Lundberg J, Kirsh KL, et al. *J of Pain & Sympt Manage* 2002; 23(6):526-532.

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Abstract:

This open-label pilot study explored the antiemetic activity of olanzapine, an atypical antipsychotic, in patients with advanced cancer requiring opioid analgesics for pain. Fifteen patients received 2 days of a washout and placebo “run-in” followed by two day periods on each of three doses of olanzapine (2.5 mgs, 5 mgs, and 10 mgs). Patients completed a daily food journal as well as the Mini Mental State Exam, Simpson Angus Scale, Barnes Akathisia Scale, and the Functional Assessment of Cancer Therapy-General across four time periods, with special attention being placed on the nausea item. Eleven women and 4 men with varied primary cancer sites participated. The average age of the sample was 58 years (SD = 16.8). All three dose-levels were associated with significant reductions in nausea compared to baseline. Diary entries recorded by the subjects suggested substantial benefits to overall well being and the 5 mg condition was associated with statistically significant improvement in overall quality of life over baseline (F = 12.0, p < 0.005). No extrapyramidal symptoms were noted and mental status exams were not changed over the course of the eight days. These results suggest an antiemetic effect for olanzapine and indicate the need for a controlled trial.

Comments:

Strengths/uniqueness:

Introduction of a new approach to consider in the management of nausea in advanced cancer patients.

Weaknesses:

Authors acknowledge results are tentative due to open label design, short treatment periods and small sample size. Other issues are poorly substantiated description of clinical problem, no information on standard management in this center and etiology of nausea in the patients treated, mismatch in initial nausea severity at screening compared to baseline measurements, and no comment on economic vs. clinical benefit considerations.

Relevance to Palliative Care:

Results are preliminary and further study and comparison with standard management is required. However the study design is a useful model for other researchers to critique when considering a trial of nausea management in a similar population.