

Discrepancy between objective weight gain and recognition as a side effect of anti-psychotic treatment

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Weight gain is a frequent side effect of neuroleptic treatment, and it also has an unfavorable influence on patient compliance. In clinical studies, side effects are often underreported [1]. To investigate these side effects, 62 schizophrenic patients were recently included in a multicenter study on the relapse-preventative effect of flupentixol–decanoat over one year [3]. The documentation of side effects was based on the patients' reports and the treating physicians' clinical judgement. Patients' weight was checked every three months. These results showed: a weight gain of 2–5 kg amongst 11 patients; a weight gain of more than 5–10 kg amongst another 11 patients; and a weight gain of more than 10 kg amongst four patients. This means that 26 patients (42%) had a weight gain of at least 2 kg, and 15 patients (24%) showed a weight gain of more than 5 kg. Weight gain has been documented as a side effect only three times (that is, in 20% of the cases with notable weight gain of more than 5 kg and in 5% of the whole group).

Body weight depends on a number of factors, such as food intake, the level of activity and so on. Some of these factors are influenced more or less by anti-psychotic drugs [4]. Contrary to routine conditions, in clinical studies the registration and documentation of side effects are required by a study protocol. The low recognition-rate (of only 20%) of the cases with considerable weight gain is difficult to explain. One pos-

sible explanation is that body weight usually increases gradually and is therefore very easily overlooked by the physician, more so than other symptoms with a more rapid onset. Patients and physicians might also attribute the weight gain to factors other than the medication.

Being overweight is a frequent problem among psychiatric patients and it has negative effects on the patients' health, self esteem, and compliance [2]. These problems should be taken into greater consideration in the daily clinical routine. As our data show, the spontaneous reporting by patients and the clinical judgement of physicians are not sufficient for the detection of weight gain.

REFERENCES

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