

### **Risk of stroke** <sup>2,3</sup>

- Taking anti-psychotic medication increases the risk of stroke from 1.1% to 2.8%
- Example. If 1000 people with dementia are followed up for 6-12 weeks then:
  - 11 people will have a stroke
- If those 1000 people are given anti-psychotic medication then:
  - A further 17 people will have a stroke.
  - 972 people will not have a stroke

### **Risk of death** <sup>2,3</sup>

- The risk of death is increased from 2.4% to 3.4%
- Example. If 1000 people with dementia are followed up for 6-12 weeks then:
  - 24 people will die
- If those 1000 people are given anti-psychotic medication then:
  - A further 10 people will die.
  - 966 people will not die.

The doctor or nurse will discuss with the patient (where possible) and a family member or carer when considering these medications. There is often a balance between quality of life and risk of side effects.

### **How long are anti-psychotics given?**

In most cases we give people a short course of medication (up to 6-12 weeks). We know that usually a person's symptoms get better in time (often just a few weeks) and we aim to stop the medication as early as possible. A small number of people may need to be on medication longer term. This group of people often have the most severe and distressing symptoms.

The following websites contain useful information and links to resources:

#### **Alzheimer Scotland**

0808 808 3000

[www.alzscot.org](http://www.alzscot.org)

#### **Alzheimer Society**

[www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)

### **References**

- 1) Schneider LS, Dagerman K, Insel PS. Efficacy and adverse effects of atypical antipsychotics for dementia: meta-analysis of randomised, placebo-controlled trials. *Am J Geriatr Psychiatry* 2006; 14:191-210
- 2) Banerjee S. The use of antipsychotic medication for people with dementia: time for action. A report for the Minister of State for Care Services 2009
- 3) Patient decision aid: Antipsychotic drugs in dementia. National Prescribing Centre. [http://www.npc.nhs.uk/therapeutics/cns/dementia/resources/pda\\_dementia\\_antipsychotics.pdf](http://www.npc.nhs.uk/therapeutics/cns/dementia/resources/pda_dementia_antipsychotics.pdf)

Information for carers and patients about

## **Anti-psychotic Medication in Dementia**

## What is dementia?

Dementia is an illness that causes a progressive worsening of brain function. Dementia affects people in different ways and common symptoms are memory loss, difficulties with communication and personality change. There are many causes of dementia but the common types are Alzheimer's and Vascular.

## What are behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia?

People with dementia can develop behavioural and psychological symptoms which become more common as the illness develops. These symptoms can be distressing for the person and for those who care for them.

Sometimes a person may develop delusions (believing things that aren't true, like people stealing from them) or hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that aren't there).

Other times a person's character may change, making them more easily upset, angry or even aggressive.

## What is anti-psychotic medication?

Currently one medication, Risperidone, is licensed for use in severe distress or aggression in Alzheimer's dementia.

There are other anti-psychotics which are commonly used including;

- Haloperidol which we may use if a person has delirium as well as dementia;
- Quetiapine which we use in Parkinson's or Lewy body dementia.

## When do we use anti-psychotics?

In some cases a person may become very severely distressed by their symptoms or the level of physical aggression becomes hard to manage them safely.

We always aim to manage these symptoms using non – drug methods, such as distraction and taking part in other activities. Occasionally however this does not work and the Doctor or Nurse may suggest using an anti-psychotic drug.

We only use these drugs when other alternatives do not work and the person is very distressed or aggressive.

## What are the benefits of using anti-psychotics?

These medications have been shown to be helpful for reducing levels of physical aggression and reducing psychotic symptoms (such as delusions and hallucinations).

For some people with dementia this can make a big difference to them, their family and carers.

## Are there any risks of using anti-psychotics?

No medication is free from side effects. This group of medications however has been shown to cause some important side effects.

These include:<sup>1</sup>

- Sedation (drowsiness)
- Muscle stiffness, slowing of movements or shakiness
- Ankle swelling
- Increased risk of falls
- Increased risk of infections
- Increased risk of blood clots
- Increased risk of stroke
- Increased risk of death