

# Clinical Pearls

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## Clinical Pearl 18/05/21

Each week we will aim to bring out a concise email that provides 4-5 key pieces of information addressing a specific issue in clinical therapeutics.

### Depression in Dementia

#### Lisa Austin – Clinical Pharmacist

- The use of antidepressants in dementia with depressive symptoms is widespread, but their clinical efficacy is uncertain.
- A Cochrane review in 2018 by Dudas et al, showed there is a **lack of evidence to support the use of antidepressants for major depression in dementia**, especially beyond 12 weeks i.e., they had limited or no efficacy.
- However, if an antidepressant is appropriate for depression in dementia, use (for > 65years):
  - **Citalopram** 10mg mane (up to 20mg daily)
  - **Escitalopram** 5mg mane (up to 10mg daily)
- Mirtazapine and sertraline seem ineffective in people with dementia and depression.
- Consider a lower starting dose in the elderly with a more gradual increase to minimise adverse effects such as falls.
- **Optimise nonpharmacological interventions** and offer psychological therapies.
- Monitor for **adverse effects** (e.g., dry mouth, dizziness, hyponatraemia) and **increase falls risk and fractures** in older people.
- If patient experiences an adverse effect, consider if it could be relieved by:
  - adjusting the dose (e.g., slowing up titration for initial adverse effects - nausea, restlessness, or agitation)
  - adjusting the regimen (e.g., changing to morning dosing if insomnia with night-time dosing)
  - addressing drug interactions
  - symptomatic management

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- Antidepressants with **significant anticholinergic effects** (e.g., tricyclic antidepressants) should be **avoided** - may impair cognition and increase the risk of delirium.
- **Regularly review** antidepressant treatment response and monitor for adverse effects (document in progress notes).

## References:

Depression in Dementia. In: eTG complete [digital]. Melbourne: Therapeutic Guidelines Limited; 2021 March. <<https://www.tg.org.au/>>

Dudas R, Malouf R, McCleery J, Dening T. Antidepressants for treating depression in dementia. Cochrane Database Syst Rev 2018;8

Please consider these issues when preparing or interpreting RMMR reports or education sessions. Contributions of content or suggested topics are welcome and should be sent directly to [natalie@wardmm.com.au](mailto:natalie@wardmm.com.au)