

Clinical Pearls

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Clinical Pearl 12/03/19

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.

This week: Sodium Valproate for Treating Agitation in Dementia

Natalie Soulsby – Head of Clinical Development

The Royal Commission has brought in to question the use of anti-psychotics and sedatives for treating behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia (BPSD). The question then is: Are there any alternative medications that can be used?

We have noticed that there appears to be an increase in prescribing of valproate (Epilim®) to treat this problem.

- Valproate is licensed for use to treat epilepsy, migraine and as a mood stabiliser in the management of bipolar disorder. It is also used for treating people with resistant depression as an adjunct to their antidepressants and has been used to treat neuropathic pain.
- Gastrointestinal side effects like nausea and vomiting are common but can be reduced by administering valproate with food. The other main side effects to be aware of are drowsiness, dizziness and memory impairment which are commonly seen with valproate and are likely to be more prevalent on the older person.
- Valproate use is also associated with increased risk of serious adverse effects including falls, hyponatraemia, blood dyscrasias, worsening of chronic kidney disease (CKD), and reduced bone density with long term use.
- With long term use BMD monitoring is recommended as well as ensuring Vitamin D status and calcium intake are adequate.
- A Cochrane review was published in October 2018 which reviewed the evidence about how effective and safe using valproate is to treat agitation in people with dementia.

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- The reviewers only found 5 small studies that could be included in the review and their conclusion was that valproate is probably ineffective in treating agitation in dementia and is associated with a higher risk of adverse effects and possibly serious adverse effects especially in the frail older person.
- There is no evidence that valproate is effective in the management of aggression in dementia.

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