

USE OF PSYCHOACTIVE DRUGS AMONG PATIENTS VISITING OUTPATIENT CLINICS IN KARACHI, PAKISTAN

Dear Sir,

I read with great interest the study by Khuwaja et al regarding psychoactive drug use in patients attending outpatient clinics in Karachi, Pakistan.⁽¹⁾ This study is of particular relevance to us, as India also has similar problems regarding the control of sale of such drugs over-the-counter. The results are not surprising, but confirm what we encounter in every day practice. The study produced valuable information, however a major lacuna was the absence of data regarding the kind of drugs the study subjects were on. In clinical practice, the most commonly-abused psychoactive drugs that we encounter are the benzodiazepines. These are prescribed for various indications, ranging from insomnia to anxiety. Not only do they lead to dependence, they also have significant adverse effects in certain groups of people such as the elderly.

The authors may have done well to provide us with the number of elderly in the study population. This information would be significant since it is in this group, especially in women that anxiety and insomnia are common complaints, leading to prescription of psychoactive compounds. This is also the subset of patients in whom the drugs will produce the most problems. Several studies have shown that benzodiazepines may lead to sedation, falls, cognitive decline and impaired motor skills.⁽²⁾ That several of these patients had been prescribed these drugs by their physicians, raises the issue of physician driven or assisted drug abuse. This article raises very pertinent questions regarding the control of prescription and sale of psychoactive drugs, that need to be addressed both at the level of national medical associations and drug control authorities.

Yours sincerely,

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