

Dopamine antagonist antipsychotics in diverted forensic populations

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In community settings, negative symptoms and cognitive deficits are the primary barriers to independent living, stable relationships, and employment for individuals suffering from schizophrenia-spectrum disorders. In contrast, however, positive psychotic symptoms (e.g., command hallucinations and persecutory delusions) often drive behavior which serves as the gateway to arrest and criminalization. Historically, the keystone of treatment for positive psychotic symptoms has been antagonism of dopamine D2 receptors in the mesolimbic tract. In this article, we review and explore the principles underlying dopamine antagonism for the treatment of psychosis; optimization of dopamine antagonists in treating positive psychotic symptoms; the advantages of depot dopamine antagonist antipsychotics in forensic settings; the concepts of pharmacokinetic and pharmacodynamic treatment failures; and the role of medication plasma concentrations in optimizing and managing treatment.

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Introduction

In community settings, the principle barriers to independent living, stable relationships, and gainful employment arise from the negative and cognitive symptom domains of schizophrenia-spectrum disorders.^{1,2} In contrast, the positive symptoms of psychosis often are the gateway (e.g., via persecutory delusion associated with anger) to arrest and criminalization for the mentally ill.^{3,4} Since the clinical discovery of chlorpromazine in 1952, dopamine antagonism in the mesolimbic dopamine circuit has been central to treating the positive symptoms of psychosis.^{5,6} The hyperactivity of the mesolimbic circuit and the normalizing effects of the dopamine antagonist antipsychotics are illustrated in Figure 1.

In this review, we seek to understand the roles of dopamine antagonist antipsychotics, including the use of long-acting or depot formulations and plasma

concentrations, in controlling the positive symptoms of psychosis, thereby supporting decriminalization of those suffering from psychotic disorders.⁷

Principle Text

The French pharmaceutical firm, Rhône-Poulenc, began exploring polycyclic antihistamine compounds in 1933. This led to the approval and clinical introduction of diphenhydramine in 1946. Promethazine, a phenothiazine derivative, was approved the following year. Although this compound produced sedation, decreased motor activity, and indifference to stimulation in rats, it had much more limited effects in humans.

In 1948, a French surgeon named Pierre Huguenard began using a combination of promethazine and pethidine (a.k.a. meperidine), an opioid, as preoperative medications to calm and sedate patients. Henry Laborit, another French surgeon, subsequently proposed to Rhône-Poulenc that a more effective replacement for promethazine be sought. Consequently in December 1950, the chemist Paul Charpentier produced various compounds related to promethazine, including RP-4560 or chlorpromazine.

Chlorpromazine appeared to be the most promising compound because of its lesser peripheral effects.

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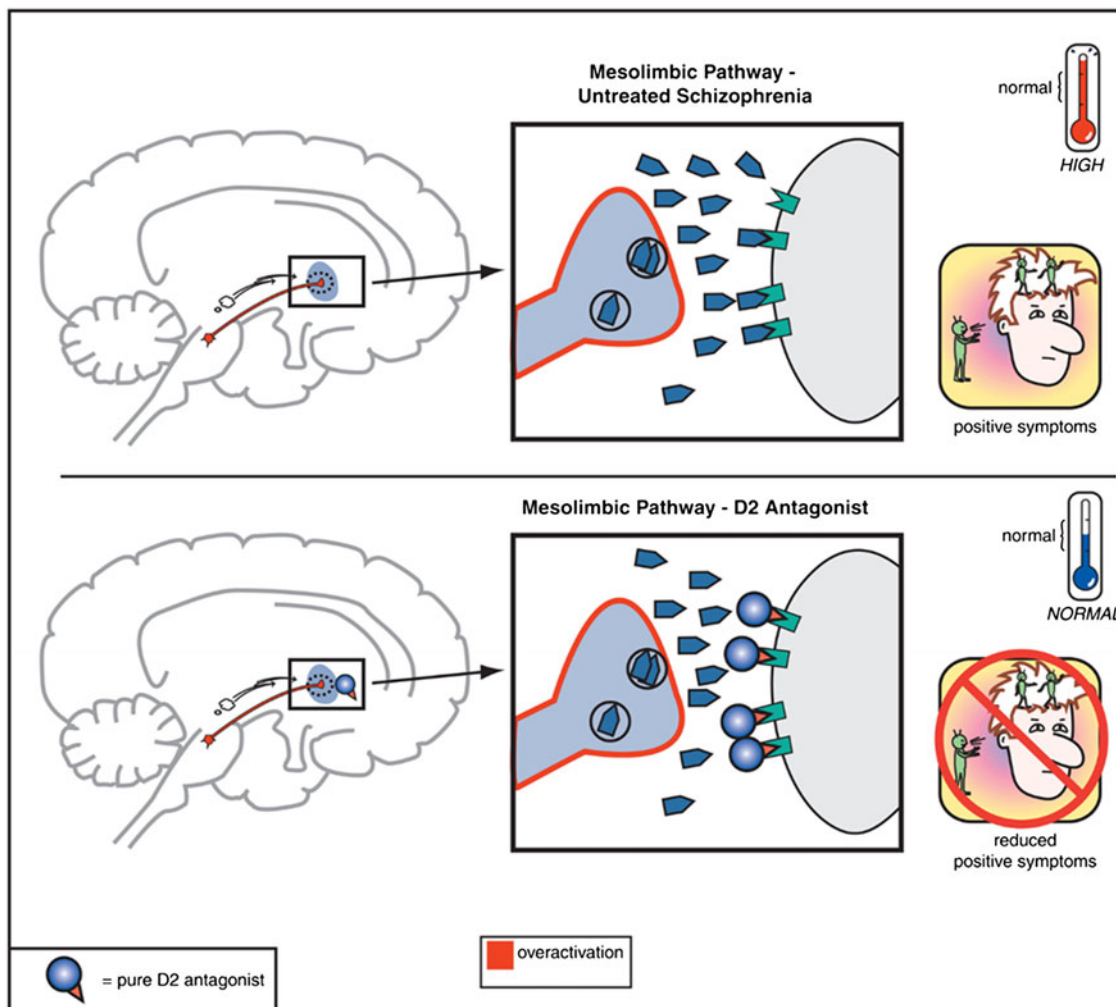


FIGURE 1. Mesolimbic pathway and D2 antagonists.

Chlorpromazine was distributed for testing in humans between April and August 1951. In this context, Henry Laborit tested chlorpromazine at the Val-de-Grâce Military Hospital in Paris. Dr. Laborit found the drug effective, as it produced a state akin to artificial hibernation. In fact, Dr. Laborit became such a proponent of chlorpromazine that it became colloquially known as “Laborit’s drug.”

Nevertheless, chlorpromazine’s use as a preoperative drug was cut short by its propensity to induce orthostatic hypotension and syncope via antagonism at α -adrenergic receptors. Despite this failure, a French psychiatrist named Pierre Deniker had been aware of chlorpromazine and was interested in using it to calm psychotic and manic patients at St. Anne’s Hospital in Paris. Dr. Deniker’s application of chlorpromazine to psychiatric patients was supported by Professor Jean Delay, who was the superintendent of St. Anne’s during that time. Treatment with chlorpromazine proved more successful than Dr. Deniker and Dr. Delay had hoped. It reduced

positive psychotic symptoms such as delusional ideation and hallucinations. Additionally, it calmed agitated and regressed behaviors while promoting emotional stability. Consequently, the success of chlorpromazine in psychiatry was likened to the discovery of antibiotics with respect to medical importance. Chlorpromazine’s achievement led to the development of first-generation antipsychotics, several of which continue to be used clinically today (see Table 1).⁸

Clozapine, the first second-generation antipsychotic, was synthesized by Schmutz and Eichenberger in 1958. It has since become the gold standard for the management of treatment-resistant schizophrenia and pointed to pathological mechanisms in schizophrenia-spectrum disorders beyond dysregulation of dopamine (i.e., glutamate hypoactivity and, perhaps, muscarinic hypoactivity).⁹ The success of clozapine and its difficult adverse effect profile ignited substantial research in pursuit of antipsychotics that would be as effective as clozapine but with an improved safety profile.¹⁰ This plethora of research

TABLE 1. First-generation dopamine antagonists

Medication	Generic Name	Chemical Group	Comments
Acepromazine		Phenothiazine	Used primarily in veterinary medicine
Benperidol		Butyrophenone	
Bromperidol		Butyrophenone	
Carpipramine		Tricyclic	
Chlorpromazine		Phenothiazine	First antipsychotic
Chlorprothixene		Thioxanthene	
Clocapramine		Tricyclic	
Cloperithixol		Thioxanthene	
Clorotepine		Tricyclic	
Clotiapine		Tricyclic	
Compazine		Phenothiazine	Used as antiemetic
Cyamemazine		Phenothiazine	
Dixyrazine		Phenothiazine	
Droperidol		Butyrophenone	Used primarily for anesthesia
Flupenthixol		Thioxanthene	
Fluphenazine		Phenothiazine	Available as long-acting injectable
Fluspirilene		Diphenylbutylpiperidine	
Haloperidol		Butyrophenone	Available as long-acting injectable
Levomepromazine		Phenothiazine	
Loxapine		Tricyclic	Available as nasal spray
Mesoridazine		Phenothiazine	Discontinued
Molindone		Other	Discontinued
Moperone		Butyrophenone	Discontinued
Mosapramine		Tricyclic	
Pearlapine		Tricyclic	
Penfluridol		Diphenylbutylpiperidine	
Perazine		Phenothiazine	
Pericyazine		Phenothiazine	
Perphenazine		Phenothiazine	
Pimozide		Diphenylbutylpiperidine	Prone to QT prolongation
Pipamperone		Butyrophenone	Discontinued
Pipotiazine		Phenothiazine	
Prochlorperazine		Phenothiazine	
Promazine		Phenothiazine	Discontinued
Promethazine		Phenothiazine	Antipsychotic precursor
Prothipendyl		Phenothiazine	
Sulpiride		Benzamide	
Sultopride		Benzamide	
Thiopropazine		Phenothiazine	Available in Canada only among English-speaking countries
Thioridazine		Phenothiazine	Discontinued
Thiothixene		Thioxanthene	
Timiperone		Butyrophenone	
Trifluoperazine		Phenothiazine	
Triflupromazine		Phenothiazine	Discontinued
Veralipride		Benzamide	
Zuclopenthixol		Thioxanthene	

Notes: Derived from the U.S. and E.U. Pharmacopeias ([WWW.USP.ORG](http://www.usp.org) and [WWW.EDQM.EU](http://www.edqm.eu))
Red indicates those medications in common use in the United States.

resulted in the synthesis and approval of several second-generation dopamine antagonists (see Table 2).¹¹

Mechanisms

Despite various chemical subtypes, a wide range of potencies at dopamine D2 receptors and important differences in side-effect profiles based on affinities for and actions at

other receptors (i.e., adrenergic, histamine, acetylcholine, serotonin receptors, etc.), all of the dopamine antagonist antipsychotics share a principle mechanism for exerting their antipsychotic effects, namely, induction of depolarization blockade at the dopamine neurons that give rise to the mesolimbic dopamine pathway.¹² For the first-generation antipsychotics, this depolarization blockade accounted for circa 92% to 93% of antipsychotic efficacy

TABLE 2. Second-generation dopamine antagonists

Medication Generic Name	Chemical Group	Comments
Amisulpride	Benzamide	
Asenapine	Tricyclic	Available as orally dissolving tablet only
Blonanserin	Other	
lloperidone	Benzisoxazole/ Benzisothiazole	
Lurasidone	Benzisoxazole/ Benzisothiazole	Effective for bipolar depression
Melperone	Butyrphenone	
Nemonapride	Benzamide	
Olanzapine	Tricyclic	Modest glutamate modulation at high plasma concentrations (>120 ng/ml)
Paliperidone	Benzisoxazole/ Benzisothiazole	Available in controlled release and long-acting injectable formulations
Perospirone	Benzisoxazole/ Benzisothiazole	
Quetiapine	Tricyclic	Metabolite effective for bipolar depression
Remoxipride	Benzamide	
Risperidone	Benzisoxazole/ Benzisothiazole	Available in long-acting injectable formulation
Sertindole	Other	
Ziprasidone	Benzisoxazole/ Benzisothiazole	
Zotepine	Tricyclic	

Notes: Derived from the U.S. and E.U. Pharmacopeias ([WWW.USP.ORG](http://www.usp.org) and [WWW.EDQM.EU](http://www.edqm.eu))
Red indicates commonly in use in the U.S.

for these drugs.¹³ Among the second-generation antipsychotics, dopamine antagonism and depolarization blockade remains the likely principle mechanism of action, although some (e.g., olanzapine) may exert modest antipsychotic effects via the modulation of glutamate signal transduction.¹⁴ In this context, clozapine is unique in that it likely provides little, if any, of its antipsychotic efficacy via direct effects on dopamine signaling, instead more likely acting via robust modulation of glutamate.¹⁵ Thus, the first step in treating positive psychotic symptoms is to provide the patient with an adequate exposure to the initial chosen dopamine antagonist antipsychotic for an adequate amount of time.

Antipsychotic Trials

A recent consensus paper identified the parameters of an adequate antipsychotic trial as a trial of at least 6 weeks duration and a dose of at least 600 mg chlorpromazine

TABLE 3. Optimal plasma concentration ranges for selected dopamine antagonist antipsychotics

Antipsychotic	Optimal Trough Plasma Concentration Range
Fluphenazine	0.8–2.0 ng/ml in most patients 2.0–4.0 ng/ml in more ill patients
Haloperidol	5.0–20.0 ng/ml in most patients 20.0–30.0 ng/ml in more ill patients
Olanzapine	40–120 ng/ml in most patients 120–200 ng/ml in more ill patients
Paliperidone	28–112 ng/ml
Perphenazine	0.8–4.0 ng/ml

Note: Derived from the California Department of State Hospitals Psychotropic Medication Policy, Chapter 41, Appendix – Therapeutic Plasma Concentrations for Antipsychotics and Mood Stabilizers (2019).

equivalents. A duration of 4 months was given for long-acting injectable antipsychotics. Because medication adherence is often poor, this paper held a single antipsychotic plasma concentration measurement to be a minimal standard, while a more optimal standard was held to be two plasma concentration measurements separated by at least 2 weeks without prior notification of the patient. A further important principle of adequate antipsychotic trials is pursuit of the trial until one of three endpoints is achieved: improvement of psychotic signs and symptoms; emergence of intolerable adverse effects that cannot be managed via reasonable interventions; or, a point of futility is reached, for example, saturation of D2 dopamine receptors or flattening of the drug's receptor occupancy curve.¹⁶

Importantly, failure to achieve a 20% to 30% reduction in psychotic symptoms in response to two or more adequate dopamine antagonist trials indicates that the patient is treatment-resistant; that is, the patient exhibits a pharmacodynamic failure in response to adequate dopamine antagonism. Additionally, such treatment resistance portends a poor probability of response to most antipsychotic agents. Most first- and second-generation antipsychotic medications show a response rate of 0% to 5% among such patients, while high plasma concentration olanzapine (120–200 ng/ml) produces a response rate of about 7%.¹⁷ Moreover, data suggest for treatment-resistant schizophrenic patients that responsiveness to even clozapine begins to decline at about 2.8 years of treatment-resistant status.¹⁸ The low probability of response to antipsychotics other than clozapine combined with data indicating a response-decay curve to even clozapine after 2.8 years among treatment-resistant schizophrenia-spectrum disordered patients argues strongly in favor of clozapine treatment as soon as strictly defined treatment resistance is identified. That is, further time should not be wasted in pursuing treatments with a low probability of success, thereby

TABLE 4. LAI dopamine antagonist antipsychotic initiation

LAI Antipsychotic	Comments on Initiation
Fluphenazine	For each 10 mg of oral fluphenazine per day, prescribe 25 mg of fluphenazine decanoate I.M. q week times three and then continue for every 2 weeks at 12.5 mg to a maximum of 100 mg as guided by plasma concentration measurements. Optimal for most patients is 0.8–2.0 ng/ml. Some more treatment-resistant patients may require plasma concentrations of 2.0–4.0 ng/ml. Note that fluphenazine decanoate exhibits both an immediate and delayed release from its vehicle, requiring initial reduction or discontinuation of oral dosing in some individuals to avoid post-injection emergence of neurologic adverse effects.
Haloperidol	Because haloperidol decanoate has little immediate release phase, a loading dose strategy is required to avoid a need for prolonged co-administration of an oral antipsychotic. That is, administration at a fixed dose would require 3–5 months to reach steady-state. Give 100–300 mg I.M. q 1-week times two to three doses. For each 100 mg used in loading, the average steady-state plasma concentration is 7.75 ng/ml. Measurement of a plasma concentration before the third loading dose will assist in determining whether the third loading dose is needed. Measurement of a plasma concentration shortly before the first maintenance dose will be helpful in fine tuning ongoing dosing. Optimal for most patients is 5–20 ng/ml. A few more treatment-resistant patients may require plasma concentrations of 20–30 ng/ml. Adverse neurological effects become more frequent at plasma concentrations >20 ng/ml. Maintenance dosing should begin 14 days after the last loading injection. For maintenance, give on average 100 mg q 4 weeks per 20 mg of the prior oral haloperidol daily dose. If the maintenance dose exceeds 300 mg, then divide the dose and administer every 14 days, as the maximum injectable volume is 3 ml.
Olanzapine	LAI olanzapine is available in 150, 210, 300, and 405 mg doses. Oral equivalents have not been established. There is no need for oral cross-over or loading. Note, however, that a circa 0.1% risk of delirium, obtundation, and coma follows each dose. Direct nursing observation is required for a minimum of 3 h following each injection.
Paliperidone	Give an initial dose of 234 mg followed by a second initiation dose of 156 mg after 1 week. Initial doses should be deltoid. Maintenance doses may be deltoid or gluteal. The modal maintenance dose is 117 mg q 4 weeks, with a dose range of 39–234 mg. A dose of 234 mg per month produces 9-hydroxy-risperidone plasma concentrations comparable to 4–5 mg of oral risperidone per day (risperidone + 9-hydroxy-risperidone). Oral risperidone or paliperidone is not required after the initiation phase. Paliperidone palmitate extended-release (Invega Trinza®) is restricted to patients who have received effective and stable treatment with paliperidone palmitate (Invega Sustenna®) for a minimum of four (4) months. At the time, the next dose of paliperidone palmitate would be due, give the equivalent dose of paliperidone palmitate extended-release (Invega Trinza®)
Risperidone	Initiate depot risperidone (Consta®) at 25–50 mg. q 2 weeks, while continuing oral risperidone treatment. After 3 weeks have passed since the initial injection, taper and discontinue oral risperidone treatment. Each 25 mg of LAI risperidone produces plasma concentrations of risperidone + 9-hydroxy-risperidone comparable to 2 to 3 mg of oral risperidone. Risperidone also is available in a subcutaneous formulation (Perseris®) can be given in abdominal subcutaneous injections of 90 mg (0.6 ml) or 120 mg (0.8 ml), achieving plasma concentrations comparable to 3 or 4 mg of oral risperidone, respectively, at about 1 week, obviating the need for oral cross-over. Injections of this formulation are monthly.

Notes: Derived from the California Department of State Hospitals Psychotropic Medication Policy, Chapter 09, Depot Antipsychotics (2019). Also derived from package inserts for olanzapine (Zyprexa Relprev®), paliperidone (Invega Sustenna® and Invega Trinza®), and risperidone (Risperdal Consta®), as well as references 40, 41, 42, and 43. Web sites: WWW.DrugInserts.COM/lib/rx/meds/Zyprexa-Relprev-1; WWW.InvegaSustenna.COM; WWW.InvegaTrinza.COM; and, WWW.DrugInserts.COM/lib/rx/meds/Risperdal-Consta-1.

diminishing even the superior efficacy of clozapine in patients who are pharmacodynamic failures with respect to dopamine antagonism.^{19,20}

In the context of treatment-resistant schizophrenia, it is also worth noting that although there are a number of augmentation strategies ranging from antipsychotic polypharmacy to addition of medications from additional classes, the effect sizes of these strategies have been described as small or modest.²¹ Exceptions to this analysis include augmentation with mood stabilizers in schizophrenic patients exhibiting early acute psychomotor agitation or in patients exhibiting a mood component or bipolar diathesis.^{22–24} It is also worth noting that dopamine partial agonist antipsychotics may be more effective for the negative and cognitive symptom domains of schizophrenia-spectrum disorders than the positive symptom domain.^{25–27}

The second route to treatment failure for the dopamine antagonists is pharmacokinetic. In general, data have

suggested that for the dopamine antagonists, optimal antipsychotic response occurs when dopamine D2 and D3 receptor occupancies are roughly in the 60% to 80% range.²⁸ This is why assuring adequate receptor occupancy for an adequate period of time is critical to providing an adequate dopamine antagonist trial.¹⁴ In this context, it is worth noting that plasma concentrations of the antipsychotics correlate much more tightly with relevant receptor occupancies than the prescribed dose.²⁹ Numerous factors can affect the relationship between dose and plasma concentration, including adherence, absorption, distribution, catabolism, and elimination.³⁰ Hence, measuring antipsychotic plasma concentrations provides a much more precise and accurate means to assuring adequate receptor occupancy. (Please see the companion article in this issue entitled, “Monitoring and Improving Antipsychotic Adherence in Outpatient Forensic Diversion Programs,” by Meyer, J.M.)

Optimal plasma concentration ranges for selected dopamine antagonist antipsychotics are shown in Table 3.^{31,22}

Measuring plasma antipsychotic concentrations can be useful in various clinical circumstances ranging from benchmarking an optimal clinical response to assessing poor or extensive metabolism or investigating the clinical decompensation of a previously stable patient.³²

While patient factors such as drug absorption, distribution, catabolism, and elimination play important roles in determining antipsychotic efficacy, they often pale in importance when compared with medication adherence.³³ This is especially true in forensic settings, where medication diversion often becomes an added challenge.³⁴ The use of long-acting injectable (LAI) antipsychotics provides the most reliable means to address issues of non-adherence or diversion.³⁵ Because decriminalizing a portion of the arrested mentally ill population would involve release to community settings, assurance of continued treatment becomes a critical requirement for the success of any such program.³⁶ Additionally, it is worth noting that LAI antipsychotics have been associated with decreased rates of violence and criminality when compared with their oral counterparts.³⁷ In fact, the benefits of LAI antipsychotics are such that they produce an approximately 30% reduction in mortality risk when compared with the same antipsychotics prescribed in oral formulations in schizophrenia-spectrum disordered patients.³⁸

Unfortunately, LAI antipsychotics are infrequently used and thus are less familiar.³⁹ In particular, clinicians may be unfamiliar with strategies for initiating LAI antipsychotic treatment or transitioning from oral to depot formulations of dopamine antagonist antipsychotics.^{40–43} Initiation/transition strategies are summarized in Table 4.

Conclusions

While negative and cognitive psychotic symptoms are major barriers to successful social functioning and employment in the community at large, it is more often positive psychotic symptoms that result in behaviors that lead to arrest and criminalization. Dopamine antagonist antipsychotics provide the cornerstone of treatment for positive psychotic symptoms and may provide an effective means to divert the mentally ill from the path of criminalization and incarceration. Critical to their success, however, are antipsychotic trials of therapeutic dose/plasma concentration for an adequate period of time. Moreover, such medication trials should be pursued to one of three endpoints: (1) successful improvement of psychotic signs and symptoms; (2) emergence of intolerable adverse effects that do not respond to reasonable interventions; or (3) arrival at a point of futility

(e.g., saturation of D2 dopamine receptors or flattening of the medication's receptor occupancy curve).

In those patients who have pharmacodynamic failures of two adequate trials of first- or second-generation dopamine antagonist antipsychotics, a trial of clozapine should be pursued vigorously. This is true because other antipsychotics, with or without augmentation, are unlikely to produce an adequate response in patients with strictly defined treatment-resistant schizophrenia. Moreover, some data indicate that even clozapine's efficacy in this context begins to fade after treatment resistance has been present for 2.8 years. Thus, our treatment-resistant schizophrenia patients would be better served if we clinicians do not waste time pursuing multiple antipsychotic trials or seemingly endless augmentation trials which are not likely to be successful.

With respect to pharmacokinetic failures, it should be emphasized that plasma concentrations are a much better means to assess antipsychotic trial adequacy than medication dose. In this context, it must be acknowledged that the failure of medication adherence is a major cause of pharmacokinetic failure. In short, if the medication does not make it into the patient, then there is no hope for an adequate antipsychotic response. Moreover, the issue of adherence is especially important to decriminalization of the mentally ill, as such individuals would return to the community as an inherent goal of decriminalization. To date, the only formulations of the antipsychotics that we clinicians can be certain are reliably making it into the patient on an ongoing basis are the long-acting injectable antipsychotics. In fact, data indicate that these formulations produce superior antipsychotic responses and even reduce mortality when compared with their oral counterparts. They are nevertheless underutilized, often being thought of as medications "of last resort". Instead, the available data support that the long-acting injectable antipsychotics should be one of our most frequently used tools, especially in forensic populations.

Disclosure

Dr. Cummings, Dr. Proctor, and Dr. Arias declare that they have nothing to disclose.

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