Medication for Psychosis

This information is for the purpose of understanding the recommendations of a qualified medical professional and should not be used as medical advice. Work carefully with a medical practitioner to understand medications and their purpose. (CDS 2012)

Types of Medication for Psychosis

Medications for psychosis are called antipsychotics. They are also called neuroleptics. Antipsychotics are often divided into two categories. These categories are atypical antipsychotics and typical antipsychotics. Antipsychotics have been commonly used since the 1950s. Typical antipsychotic medications came first. They are known as first generation antipsychotics. Atypicals came into practice in the 1990s. They are known as second generation antipsychotics. They are more commonly prescribed today. It used to be believed they were more effective. It was also thought they had fewer side effects. But there is much debate over whether this is the case. There is evidence that the size of the dose may be part of the issue. Atypicals are given at smaller doses. It can take a lot of trial and error to find the right medication for a person with psychosis. Efforts to find one that has the best symptom control and least amount of side effects should be made.

General Purpose of the Medication

These medications are given to reduce or eliminate thought disorders related to psychosis. They are meant to help a person to stay oriented to reality. They often help to lesson hallucinations, delusions, and paranoia. In some cases, they can help with excessive feelings of anger. Anger is often not connected to a realistic understanding of what is happening.

Route

These medications can be given by mouth. They generally come in pill form. Some come in liquid form. Some of these medications can be given by injection. Oral pills and liquids must be taken daily or more than once a day. Injections may last a week or more. Injections can help a person who forgets medications or who may be reluctant to take medication on a regular basis. But they should not be used until a person has a good track record with the medication. This could cause serious side effects or adverse reactions that are more difficult to manage.

Impact

A person may feel a change in some symptoms within a few days. Hallucinations are usually the first symptom to go away. They may fade within a week or less. Delusions may take longer. Within six to twelve weeks a person will often feel the full effect of an antipsychotic. But a person may continue to struggle with symptoms at a milder level even with medication. He or she may still hear voices but be able to ignore them. A person may still have delusions. But he or she may understand that they are unlikely to be real. A person may still have feelings of paranoia or disassociation during periods of stress. Talk therapy and psychoeducation may help a person understand and manage these ongoing symptoms. A person who stops taking medication may begin to have symptoms within a few days.

Common Medication Names

Medications often have a generic name. This is the name of the active chemical in the medication. They also have a trade name. This is the name they are marketed under by a particular company. Medications here are listed alphabetically by their generic name below. A trade name may appear in parenthesis next to it. Some people respond differently to generics than trade formulas. This may be related to sensitivity to a non-active ingredient. Be alert to this if a person has different side effects or other issues when switching between generic and trade formulas.

This list is meant only as a basic review of commonly prescribe medications. It is not meant to include all medications for psychosis. You may be responsible to support a person with medication in your role as a direct support professional. If so, you must learn about his or her specific medications. You need to know why the medication is being taken. You will need to know about the proper management of the medication. This includes
storage, dosages, timing, and routes to administer them. You also need to know what to look for with regard to side effects or serious problems.

**Common atypical antipsychotics:**

- Aripiprazole (Abilify)
- Clozapine (Clozaril)
- Olanzapine (Zyprexa)
- Paliperidone (Invega)
- Quetiapine (Seroquel)
- Risperidone (Risperdal)
- Ziprasidone (Geodon)

**Common typical antipsychotics:**

- Chlorpromazine (Thorazine)
- Fluphenazine
- Haloperidol (Haldol)
- Perphenazine

**The following are additional medications that are not used as often as the medications above:**

- Loxapine (Loxitane)
- Molindone (Moban)
- Thioridazine (Mellaril)
- Thiothixene (Navane)
- Trifluoperazine (Stelazine)