

1-138 Cholinergics when – where B

TIPS Question:

A resident was prescribed Exelon 4.5mg while in the mild stage of Alzheimers Disease. She has now progressed to moderate – severe stages. Should Exelon be discontinued and if so, can it be stopped all at once or should it be discontinued in stages.

Response:

Exelon or Rivastigmine as you are aware is a cognitive enhancer. Initially, studies were centered on mild and moderate dementia and illustrated some benefits in cognition, behaviour, function, and reduction in the amount of time that the caregiver needed to provide to the individual suffering from dementia.

Recent studies have been looking at benefits in the moderately severe and have shown encouraging results. As a result, we are now seeing evidence that the cognitive enhancers may indeed be helpful in the later stages of illness.

In your particular situation with your partners-in-care, i.e. the individual, family, physician, etc. it will be important to look at the benefits and risks of the medication. A review of the common side effects will be important, i.e. as you know remembering the most common side effects of the cognitive enhancers include muscle cramps, insomnia, nausea, and diarrhea (MIND.) With Exelon, nausea is particularly relevant to monitor closely as well as weight.

One should also review those areas where Cholinergics may have an effect on a person's functioning and these were described in the Psychotropic sessions and include being cautious in regards to vulnerability as far as respiratory issues are concerned, ulcers, seizures, and cardiac conduction issues.

With this information in hand, then one can look at the potential benefits in regards to cognition, behaviour, and function. I find it a good idea to go back to the caregiver and ask what the benefits and change were initially. Were they behavioural? Were they cognitive? Were they functional? This will help you to determine what the drug has been helpful with, what it may still be helpful with and if you are going to change it, what you will need to monitor closely.

The answer therefore, is one of an individual nature. There is some evidence now that in more severe stages of Alzheimers Disease it is helpful and certainly in this case, as with any medication, monitoring the benefits and risks is going to be critical in terms of seeing whether this drug is good for this person at this time.

Please note: TIPS information should be used similar to the way you would use information from a text book! TIPS is not intended to serve as an individual consultation service! P.I.E.C.E.S. participants should use this information in context and always work closely with the family physician involved in the care of the resident or client and with other Partners In Care to find solutions to individual resident/client issues.