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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)

Article DOI: 10.21474/IJAR01/16521

DOI URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/16521>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

PRESCRIBING PSYCHOTROPIC DRUGS OUTSIDE PSYCHIATRIC SERVICES

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Manuscript Info

Manuscript History

Received: 25 January 2023

Final Accepted: 27 February 2023

Published: March 2023

Key words:-

Prescription, Psychotropic Drug,
Somatic Medicine

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the prescribing behavior of psychotropic drugs in non-psychiatric doctors, in the military hospitals of the south zone. The study was conducted over a six-month period, from May to October 2017, with a sample of 48 physicians from different disciplines and various medico-surgical services from the three hospitals. Physicians responded to an anonymous questionnaire mainly on the main drug classes prescribed psychotropic drugs, the main indications, and their frequency of prescription. The majority of physicians involved in all specialties are prescribers at variable rates. The rate of prescribers among neurologists, cardiologists, dermatologists, anesthesiologists, neurosurgeons, visceral surgeons and urologists was 100% while emergency physicians had a rate of 88.8%. In traumatologists, the rate was 75%. For ophthalmologists the rate was 50%. The rest of the specialties prescribed with a rate of less than 50%. The main psychotropic drugs prescribed were antidepressants and hypnotic / anxiolytic benzodiazepines, while the main indications were depression, anxiety disorders, insomnia and agitation. Virtually 44% of these prescribers were the initiators of treatment, and more than half of the presenters indicated that their knowledge of psychotropic drugs was limited to the therapeutic courses they received during their general medical training at the Faculty of Medicine. It is necessary to grant more hours to therapeutic courses at the faculties of medicine and pharmacy and to establish a compulsory continuing education for every doctor in the field of therapeutics and particularly that of psychotropic drugs, in order to ensure the respect of prescription rules for psychotropic drugs.

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Introduction:-

Psychotropic drugs represent all chemical substances of natural or artificial origin which have a psychic tropism, that is which are likely to modify mental activity without prejudging the type of this modification.

The increasing prevalence of mental illness places psychotropic drugs among the most prescribed medications in the world. Their use is no longer the prerogative of the psychiatrist, it has spread to other medical and surgical specialties.

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In Morocco, the state of the art of psychotropic drugs prescription remains to this day insufficiently evaluated. Thus, several questions remain concerning the prescription profile of psychotropic drugs. In 1997, a study carried out in a Moroccan social security organization (Caisse Nationale des Organismes de Prévoyance Sociale), on the profile of psychotropic drug prescribing, at a time when the list of psychotropic drugs was still being reduced, showed that 31% of prescriptions were made by medical specialty doctors and 12% by surgeons.

Surveys on the prescription practices of psychotropic drugs in general, and of the drug classes of psychotropic drugs in particular, remain rare in Moroccan hospitals.

During our visit to the southern zone, we noted the presence of two prescription attitudes. Some doctors abuse the prescription of psychotropic drugs and more particularly anxiolytics, and others are reluctant to prescribe them because of the diabolical representation that these molecules carry.

It is in this perspective that we have considered a survey, among non-psychiatrist doctors practicing in military hospitals deployed in the southern zone, which aims at evaluating the attitudes of doctors other than psychiatrists, all statuses included, in relation to the prescription of psychotropic drugs as well as its frequency in order to propose, possibly, recommendations for their rational use.

Material And Methods:-

Type of study

This is a prospective descriptive and analytical study.

A survey on the prescription of psychotropic drugs among non-psychiatrist hospital practitioners working in military hospitals in the southern zone.

Period of the study

The study was conducted during a six month period, from May to October 2021.

Location of the study

This survey was conducted among hospital practitioners: residents, generalists, specialists and teachers, practicing in the medical-surgical services of three military hospitals: Laayoune, Dakhla and Guelmim.

Method of administration

The doctors of the three hospitals were contacted by telephone, to explain the purpose of our survey before sending them the link of the questionnaire to their e-mail address.

The answers were collected with the help of the computer tool (Google forms) which allowed us to transcribe the results in numerical values for each point and to obtain graphs.

Questionnaire

The anonymous questionnaire consisted of nine closed questions; some were single choice and others multiple choice, as well as two free comment boxes, in the first free box the prescriber was asked to justify his abstinence from prescribing a psychotropic drug, and in the second free box, was to specify the other reasons for prescription.

The questions mainly concerned the prescriber's status, specialty, and length of practice, as well as his or her behavior when faced with a necessary prescription of psychotropic drugs, with the precision of the therapeutic class chosen, the indications and the frequency of prescription.

Results:-

Difficulties encountered during the study :

As with any study, certain difficulties were encountered:

Selection bias:

The participation of the subjects is based on the voluntariness and consent of these solicited physicians.

Our study had a selection bias also related to the number of practitioners assigned to the southern zone which is low in general and in some specialties the number of doctors was not significant (only one specialist).

Time factor

The choice of the number of participating physicians was conditioned by their availability and their effective presence in the services in which they were assigned. Thus, it was necessary to give some time to all the participants to answer the study questionnaire.

Furthermore, the exploitation and transcription of the results required additional research and learning in computer science in order to obtain statistical values for each parameter.

As a result, only 48 of the doctors in the various medical-surgical departments responded to the questionnaire, i.e. 68.5%.

Prescriber status

In our study, general practitioners represent 35.4%, specialists 33.3%, residents 18.75% and teachers represent 12.5%.

Specialty of the prescriber

The prescription of psychotropic drugs varied according to specialty. The rate of prescribers among neurologists, cardiologists, dermatologists, anesthesiologists, neurosurgeons, visceral surgeons and urologists was 100% while emergency physicians had a rate of 88.8%. For traumatologists, the rate was 75%. For ophthalmologists the rate was 50%, while nephrologists had a rate of 33.3%.

The other specialists were prescribers at lower rates.

Prescription of psychotropic drugs

Antidepressants

Tricyclic or imipraminic antidepressants

The prescription rate of tricyclic or imipraminic antidepressants among intensive care anesthetists, neurosurgeons, neurologists and internists was 100%. Urologists had a rate of 66.6% and emergency physicians had a rate of 11.76%. The other disciplines did not prescribe this drug class.

Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs)

The prescription rate for SSRIs among neurologists, dermatologists, resuscitators, gastroenterologists, neurosurgeons, cardiologists, visceral surgeons and internists was 100%, while emergency physicians prescribed at a rate of 76.4%. For nephrologists and urologists, the rate was 66.6% and 75% for traumatologists. While for ophthalmologists, the prescription rate was 50%. Endocrinologists and ENT specialists did not prescribe this drug class.

Serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs).

The prescription rate for SNRIs among neurologists and internists was 100%, and 50% for neurosurgeons and dermatologists. For urologists and resuscitators the rate was 33.33% and 5.8% for emergency physicians. For the other specialties, the rate was zero.

Anxiolytics

Benzodiazepine anxiolytics

The prescription rate for anxiolytics among neurologists, neurosurgeons, internists, cardiologists, gastroenterologists, resuscitators and dermatologists was 100%. Traumatologists had a rate of 75% and emergency physicians had a rate of 52.9%, while visceral surgeons had a rate of 66.6%.The other specialties had rates below 33.3%. Prescription among pulmonologists was nil.

Non-benzodiazepine anxiolytics

The prescription rate for non-benzodiazepine anxiolytics was 100% in neurologists, internists and pulmonologists. Emergency physicians had a rate of 70.5%.The other specialties did not prescribe this drug class.

Hypnotics

Benzodiazepine hypnotics

The prescription rate of benzodiazepine hypnotics among resuscitators, dermatologists, gastroenterologists, neurologists, neurosurgeons, cardiologists and internists was 100%. It was 75% among trauma specialists. Nephrologists and urologists had a rate of 66.6% and emergency physicians had a rate of 64.7%, while for visceral surgeons, it was 33.3% and nil for pulmonologists and ophthalmologists.

Hypnotics, structural analogues of benzodiazepines

The rate of prescription of structural analogues of benzodiazepines among neurologists, neurosurgeons, and intensive care anesthetists was 100%; this rate was 58.8% among emergency physicians and 50% among ophthalmologists, urologists and gastroenterologists. Traumatologists and visceral surgeons had rates of 25% and 33.33% respectively. For the other specialists the rate was zero.

Other hypnogenic drugs

The rate of prescription of other hypnogenic drugs was 100% in neurologists, neurosurgeons, dermatologists, internists, pulmonologists, cardiologists and resuscitators. Emergency physicians had a rate of 76.4% and visceral surgeons had a rate of 66.6%. For ophthalmologists and gastroenterologists, the rates were 50%. While a rate of 25% was recorded for traumatologists. The other specialties had a zero rate.

Neuroleptics

The rate of prescription of typical neuroleptics among neurologists, neurosurgeons, resuscitators, internists and gastroenterologists was 100%. It was 33.3% among nephrologists. The other specialties did not prescribe classical neuroleptics.

Atypical neuroleptics

The prescription rate of atypical neuroleptics among neurologists, internists and neurosurgeons was 100%. Intensive care anesthetists and visceral surgeons had a rate of 66.6%. Dermatologists and gastroenterologists had a rate of 50%. In urology, the rate was 33.33. While for the other specialties the rate was less than 20% or nil.

Thymoregulators

Lithium

Only the resuscitators prescribed lithium with a rate of 33.3%. The other specialties never prescribed Lithium.

Carbamazepine

The prescription rate of carbamazepine among neurologists, neurosurgeons, cardiologists, resuscitators and internists was 100%. Among visceral surgeons and nephrologists the rate was 66.6%. Emergency physicians had a rate of 29.4%.

For the remaining specialists, the rate of carbamazepine prescription was zero.

Valproic acid

The valproic acid prescription rate among neurologists, neurosurgeons, resuscitators, cardiologists and internists was 100%. Among visceral surgeons, the rate was 66.6%; urologists and nephrologists had a rate of 33.3%, while for emergency physicians the rate was 23.5%.

For the rest of the specialists, the rate of prescription of valproic acid was zero.

Lamotrigine

The prescription rate of lamotrigine among neurologists and neurosurgeons was 100%. While resuscitators had a rate of 33.3%.

For the other specialists, the rate of lamotrigine prescription was nil.

Discussion:-

Our study focuses on non-psychiatric practitioners in three military hospitals located in the southern zone. These three structures have a very important role in the medical and surgical care of a large part of the military and civilian population.

We chose to start our work after obtaining 48 responses, which represents two thirds of the military doctors practicing in this zone.

We are aware of the shortcomings of this survey in terms of the number of participating physicians.

Profile of the prescriber

Prescriber status

In our study, the most common prescribers of psychotropic drugs were general practitioners, with specialists in second place, followed by residents and then teachers. A survey carried out in a Moroccan social security organization, the CNOPS (Caisse Nationale des Organismes de Prévoyance Sociale) in 1997 showed that general practitioners were in first place for prescribing psychotropic drugs with a rate of 27.2% [2]. In a study carried out at the HMIMV, the most prescribers were teachers while the last prescribers were residents [1].

These results can be explained by the high number of general practitioners practicing in the hospitals of the study area compared to specialists.

Specialty of prescribers

Our results showed that the prescription of psychotropic drugs varied from one specialty to another and from one doctor to another of the same specialty. The same observation was described by the study carried out at the Mohammed V military hospital.

Duration of practice

In our survey, more than half (53.1%) of the prescribers had been practicing for less than 5 years. Contrary to the results obtained in the study carried out at the HMIMV which showed that the prescription of psychotropic drugs increases with the seniority of the practitioner's experience (three quarters of the prescribers had more than ten years of practice in their disciplines), this is essentially due to the regulations governing human resources and which required the mandatory passage in the operational zone of young doctors.

Prescription of psychotropic drugs

Among the doctors interviewed, there were those who prescribed psychotropic drugs (75.5%) and others who abstained (24.5%) for different reasons: the risks and serious side effects and the presence of a psychiatrist in the hospital.

Conclusion:-

This study shows the high frequency of prescription of psychotropic drugs by non-psychiatrist physicians in the southern zone (85.41%). This frequency would be more important than that at the level of hospitals in the northern zone (HMIMV).

The study also shows that most doctors, other than psychiatrists, prescribe all types of psychotropic drugs for psychiatric and other somatic indications with varying frequency, while their training in psychotropic drugs is considered by themselves to be insufficient.

Only a minority (27.1%) of the physicians surveyed claimed to have improved their knowledge through continuing education, while more than two thirds (87.5%) prescribed therapeutic classes based on their knowledge of therapeutics courses received during their medical school training.

These results show the inadequate use of psychotropic drugs and the non-respect of prescription rules which are linked to the patient and his environment; to the pharmacological treatment; to the disease; to the therapeutic relationship between doctor and patient.

It is therefore necessary to institutionalize continuing education for specialist physicians other than psychiatrists. Moreover, a functional pharmaceutical information system should be set up to regularly remind prescribers of the rules of prescribing drugs in general and potentially addictive drugs in particular.

Prescribing psychotropic drugs is only one aspect of a therapeutic project in mental health. Thus, it must be relevant with respect to the diagnosis, the indications and the rules of prescription without any reluctance to call upon the psychiatrist when necessary.

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