

The pattern of benzodiazepine prescribing among Slovenian general practitioners

IGOR ŠVAB, MARKO KOLŠEK and NENA KOPČAVAR GUČEK

Department of Family Medicine, Medical School, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia

BACKGROUND: Among the psychotropic drugs prescribed in medicine, benzodiazepines are most frequently prescribed. Their side effects have been identified for decades: lack of concentration, drug dependence and even home injuries (such as hip fracture) among the elderly. It has been estimated that 70% of all prescriptions are issued by family practitioners. Therefore, most benzodiazepines are prescribed on primary level as well. Routinely collected data gives little insight in doctor's decision making. Several factors determine drugs prescribing, such as current guidelines, the health insurance limitations, price of drugs, lack of time in consultation, individual style of the prescribing doctor, doctor-patient relationship etc.

AIM: The aim of our cross-sectional study was to provide an overview of psychotropic drugs prescribing in Slovenian general practice.

METHODOLOGY: A representative sample of 42 Slovene general practitioners have recorded 300 consecutive consultations in their practice during regular work. In 12296 consultations that were recorded and entered in database, data on drug prescribing was analysed separately.

RESULTS: 519 patients (pts) received prescriptions for benzodiazepines, of which 511 pts received one and 8 pts received two prescriptions. Of pts who received these prescriptions, women were more frequent ($p < 0,001$), they were older than the average visitor of the practice (60,0 vs 51,5, $p < 0,001$) and their level of education was lower. 53,4% of these pts completed elementary school only and had no professional education, compared to 40,8% of likewise educated pts in the group without benzodiazepine prescriptions ($p < 0,001$). In 438 pts (3,5% of all), benzodiazepines were prescribed in combination with other medication and in 81 pts (0,6%) benzodiazepines were the sole medication prescribed.

CONCLUSIONS: Data collected in our study suggests that more education is needed on undergraduate and postgraduate level. Likewise, further research is needed to assess the cases of inappropriate, harmful and possible over-prescribing of psychotropic drugs in general practice.

KEYWORDS: *General practitioner, Prescribing of psychoactive drugs, Cross-sectional study*

Corresponding author: igor.svab@mf.uni-lj.si