ANTIBIOTICS MAY BE INSOMNOGENIC

Michael Perlis, Heather Kennedy, Charcy Salamone, Carla Jungquist, Gary Kochersberger, Ken Plotkin, Jeffrey Allen, Suzanne Karan, Denham Ward and Sharon Ternu Io

INTRODUCTION

It is well established that medications which alter CNS neurotransmission may produce acute insomnia. The most common insomnogenic agents are SSRIs, beta adrenergic antagonists, alpha-2 adrenergic agonists, calcium channel blockers, corticosteroids, and adenosine antagonists. The extent to which insomnia may occur as a side effect of other classes of medications is less well known. In the present report, we call attention to cases which suggest that antibiotics may be insomnogenic.

METHODS

A survey was undertaken using the Physicians' Desk Reference to document the occurrence of insomnia with seven classes of antibiotics including the cephalosporins (n=14), quinolones (7), penicillins (n=7), tetracyclines (n=1), aminoglycosides (n=2), macrolides (n=4) and B-lactam (n=2) antibiotics.

RESULTS

While the occurrence of insomnia as an iatrogenic effect was found to be relatively uncommon (< 7% incidence), five of the classes were found to reliably have insomnia as a side effect: 100% of the quinolones, 57% of the penicillins, 50% of the B-lactam medications, 37% of the cephalosporins, and 25% of the macrolides have insomnia as a potential side effect. No such association existed for tetracycline and aminoglycosides. Insomnia occurred most reliably with the penicillin zosan (6.6%) and the quinolone floxin (3%).

DISCUSSION

These data suggest that antibiotics are not benign with respect to sleep and that they may serve as a precipitating factor for insomnia. Further research is needed to determine: 1) what factors predispose the individual to this particular stress-defense, 2) precisely what aspects of sleep continuity are affected (sleep initiation, maintenance, or both) and 3) how such medications at a mechanistic level, result in sleep continuity disturbance. With respect to the last of these points, it has been suggested that antibiotics may cause delirium and/or seizures via the inhibition of GABA activity. A similar mechanism may be responsible for the occurrence of insomnia as a side effect, and particularly with the quinolones and zosyn.