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Drugs In The News

In recent years mental health and the people affected by it, is now a subject touched on more often than ever before. After reading the article "Many People Taking Antidepressants Discover They Cannot Quit" in the New York Times, I couldn't help but experience a range of emotions. After becoming exposed to the fact that antidepressants are addicting, I was in a state of shock. In this article many people who take antidepressants become biologically dependent on them, primarily because of the side effects that are experienced when they attempt to come off. Side effects vary from dizziness, fatigue, nausea and irritability, to brain "zaps", fainting, and hallucinations to name the least. It is difficult to fathom the fact that people who are already dealing with mental health issues, have to deal with such side effects post treatment. To make matters worse, the rate of antidepressant prescriptions is only increasing, as healthcare professionals can't help but overprescribe, in order to cater to their patient's desires for a "quick fix." The article even states, that all bottles of medication under-tone the severity of the adverse effects of the medication. But why state the truth, if the truth would interfere with the billions of dollars in profit in the pharmaceutical industry?

Who is at stake here? Patients who are suffering when they are simply just trying to come off the medication. A woman, who was one of the sources of the article, stated that in her early 20s she was prescribed antidepressants to treat her pre-menstrual symptoms. Unfortunately, even after 25 years, she is still struggling to come off the medication completely. She was only successful in tapering down to a lower dose of the medication. When she did come off she was bedridden due to severe withdrawal side effects. This also shows that antidepressants are clearly over prescribed when in fact this woman could have been given birth control pills instead or maybe even ibuprofen. On the other hand if patients become more aware of the withdrawal effects, then maybe antidepressants won't be sold/prescribed as much.

Upon doing research I found a study, "How many of 1829 antidepressant users report withdrawal effects or addiction?" that included a total of 1367 patients that were on antidepressants. In a survey questionnaire, 54.9% of participants reported having withdrawal side effects after stopping being on the drug. 27.4% of participants reported feeling addicted to antidepressants. Surprisingly, when the survey asked how many patients recall being told by the prescriber about the withdrawal difficulty, only 0.9%, that is 17 people out of 1367 recalled being informed! This survey supports the fact that doctors fail to inform their patients about the extent/severity of the side effects during withdrawal of anti-depressants.

The ethical issue in the antidepressant/pharmaceutical industry is that many healthcare professionals choose to medicate their patients, with little or no effort to try to address the underlying reason for the patient's symptoms. In addition many doctors fail to mention the side effects the patient might encounter when he or she choose to come off the medication. Every patient has the right to know the side effects of the medication, and the right to have such information correctly and cleared stated to them. Unfortunately health care professionals rely on the medical pamphlets (that come in the packaging of the medication) to inform their patients.

The second study I found was "Antidepressant Discontinuation Syndrome: A Hypothetical Definition" to understand how antidepressant work. There are five classes of antidepressants that are available

in the industry but one of which that is most used is SSRI – selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor. A SSRI stops serotonin from being taken back into the pre synaptic neuron. This results in higher concentration of serotonin in the synaptic cleft. Since depression is believed to be due to very low serotonin levels, the drugs makes the hormone more available to our cells, consequently keeping our mood up. In this article it is stated that discontinuation syndrome can occur after 24-72 hours and can last up to two weeks. Symptoms include dizziness, fatigue, vertigo and nausea. This syndrome is more likely to happen as the drug has shorter half-life, rather long. This simply means that short half live drugs eliminate much quicker, hence they clear out the system faster, resulting in discontinuation syndrome faster. The only way of getting off the SSRIs is to taper the dosage very slowly.

One way of stopping what is now known as “discontinuation syndrome” is Society Awareness. Creating a website with every antidepressant, their side effects and with their withdrawal symptoms. The website should also specifically mention what the symptoms are and how long they can last for. It is very crucial for patients to know what they can possibly be tied down to on a daily basis. The website can be advertised on the medication packaging, which will allow patients to have an easier time becoming familiar with the medication that’s supposed to make their lives a little bit easier.

Reference:

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