

Effects of improper administration of psychotropic drugs by doctors

Improper administration of psychotropic drugs by doctors can lead to a wide range of severe consequences, including serious lifelong health risks, worsening mental health issues, drug dependency, and in extreme cases, permanent disability or death. [1, 2, 3]

Key effects include:

Physical Health Risks

- Long-term bodily harm: This can include the development of metabolic syndrome, cardiovascular disease, high cholesterol, and infertility.
- Neurological disorders: Potential for conditions like tardive dyskinesia (involuntary movements) and neuroleptic malignant syndrome (a rare but serious neurological disorder with symptoms including high fever and muscle rigidity).
- Increased risk of death: Antipsychotics, even at low doses, have been associated with an increased risk of sudden cardiac death, particularly in elderly patients or those with pre-existing heart conditions.
- General side effects: Common side effects include significant weight gain or loss, sleep problems, confusion, sedation, and issues with blood pressure or heart rhythm. [1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8]

Mental and Psychological Effects

- Exacerbation of symptoms: Inappropriate prescribing or failure to adhere to the correct regimen can worsen existing conditions, leading to increased relapse rates and treatment resistance.
- Anxiety and paranoia: Higher doses of certain psychoactive drugs can induce erratic behaviors, including violence, panic, and paranoia.
- Suicidal thoughts and behaviors: Inappropriate prescribing has been linked to increased anxiety and suicidal attempts among individuals with mental health problems.
- Emotional and psychological trauma: Patients may experience a loss of trust in their healthcare provider and the medical system, along with general anxiety regarding future medical care. [2, 3, 5, 9]

Specific Forms of Improper Administration

- **Over-prescription/Excessive Dosage:** Can lead to an increased risk of severe side effects, toxicity, drug interactions, and potential overdose.
- **Off-label use without proper oversight:** Prescribing medications for unlicensed age groups (e.g., children or the elderly) or conditions without sufficient evidence or monitoring can increase the risk of harm.
- **Failure to taper medications:** Abruptly stopping certain psychotropic medications can cause serious withdrawal symptoms (discontinuation syndrome), including nausea, delirium, psychosis, increased agitation, and insomnia.
- **Polypharmacy (too many drugs):** Using multiple psychotropic medications concurrently, especially without evidence supporting the combination, increases the risk of adverse interactions and makes it difficult to discern which medication is responsible for a patient's outcomes.
- **Use as a chemical restraint:** In long-term care settings, psychotropics are sometimes inappropriately used to sedate residents for staff convenience, rather than for a diagnosed condition, negatively affecting quality of life and increasing mortality risk. [1, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17]

Improper administration not only causes significant patient harm but can also be considered unethical, unlawful, and potentially grounds for medical malpractice lawsuits. [1, 12]

[1] <https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/article/april-2018-flores-settlement-suit-challenges-unlawful-administration-psychotropic-medication/2019-01>

[2] <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/types-of-psychoactive-drugs>

[3] <https://devonshiresclaims.co.uk/how-do-medication-errors-occur-and-what-are-their-consequences/>

[4] <https://justiceinaging.org/issue-brief-why-too-many-psychotropic-medications-in-nursing-facilities/>

[5] <https://www.langerandlanger.com/blog/inappropriate-prescribing-of-mental-health-drugs-all-too-common-infographic/>

[6] <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/antipsychotics/side-effects/>

[7] <https://www.aafp.org/pubs/afp/issues/2008/0801/p355.html>

[8] <https://justiceinaging.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Recommendation-2-Psychotropic-Medications.pdf>

[9] <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-025-22408-w>

- [10] <https://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1237&context=nursing-colloquium>
- [11] https://www.ismp-canada.org/download/PsychotropicDrugs_jan2011.pdf
- [12] <https://www.goldsmithlegal.com/blog/2023/12/failing-to-taper-certain-medications-could-harm-patients/>
- [13] <https://medicareadvocacy.org/off-label-drug-use-is-common-and-hurts-nursing-home-residents/>
- [14] <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10387813/>
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