

ANALYSIS OF PERSISTENCE TO THE TREATMENT AMONG ANTIDEPRESSANTS USERS IN TUSCANY: A LARGE REGIONAL DRUG-UTILIZATION STUDY

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Background and aim: Antidepressant drugs (ADs) are mainly used for depressive and anxiety disorders, two conditions that can co-occur in the same patient. However, ADs are also used for other medical conditions. Tuscany has always been the Italian region with the highest consumption of ADs (6 Defined Daily Dose per 100 inhabitants in 2017, according to the Italian drug agency). This evidence has raised concerns regarding the possible inappropriate use of ADs in this region. Treatment guidelines recommend AD use for at least 4-9 months and up to 2 years in depressed patients. Treatments longer than 2 years should be clinically motivated, being otherwise potentially inappropriate. The aim of this study is to analyse the utilization of ADs in Tuscany in terms of baseline characteristics of patients and pattern of utilization.

Methods: A descriptive, retrospective cohort study, based on administrative healthcare databases, was performed. We selected all individuals claiming at least one dispensed prescription (DP) of ADs (ATC code: N06A*) in 2014 with no previous use of ADs since 2011 and with at least 3 years of follow-up. Demographic data (age, sex, educational level) were collected at index date (ID), whereas comorbidities and comedications were retrieved during the 2 years before and up to 2 months after ID. Presence and persistence of use (no gap ≥ 60 days between two consecutive dates of DP) were assessed during the follow-up. In particular, we firstly evaluated persistence to the ADs treatment during the first 6 months. Subsequently, we assessed persistence during the first and second year of follow-up among those who resulted persistent during the first six months. Finally, presence of ADs use (≥ 1 DP) was evaluated during the third year.

Results: In Tuscany, 89,509 new users (NU) were found in 2014. The majority were females (65%) and aged ≥ 45 years old (76%), with diagnosis of cancer (17%) and diabetes (9%). The index AD was most commonly a SSRI (69%). During the first 6 months, 39,504 NU (36%) had only 1 DP, although in some cases new DP were registered during the second semester (13%) and the second year of follow-up (25%). Moreover, 22,688 individuals (25% of NU) had at least a treatment gap during the first 6 months. In particular, 9,662 (43%) of them had gaps of treatment among DPs and 13,026 (57%) presented a gap between the last date of dispensed prescription and the end of follow-up. Finally, 27,313 patients (31%) were persistent in the first 6 months. Notably, 14,126 (51%) of them were persistent also in the first- and 7,064 (26%) during the second- year. The occurrence of AD use during the third year paralleled the persistence in the previous years: from 16% among those who had only one DP in the first 6 months, up to 92% of those who were persistent during the entire period.

Discussions and conclusions: The observed distribution of AD use in Tuscany was in line with the epidemiology of the disease. For some patients (e.g. those with a record of cancer or diabetes), the use of ADs for indications other than primary depression, such as neuropathic pain, can be supposed. According to current guidelines, 2 out of 3 patients started the AD treatment with an SSRI. The majority of NU of ADs were not persistent to the treatment during the first 6 months. However, part of them had new dispensed prescriptions of ADs in the subsequent period. This could indicate a possible inappropriate use of drugs suggesting: 1) a suboptimal use of drugs for patients with depression; 2) an over-prescription for other indications (including those without strong evidence of efficacy). Future studies are warranted to assess potential inappropriate use of ADs in both short and long-term treated individuals, by using longer period of time and comparing Tuscany data with other settings. The resulting data would be fundamental to improve management of patients and obtain the expected safety and effectiveness outcome related to ADs use.