

College of Psychiatrists of Ireland

Press Release 03rd June 2015

The Use of Psychotropic Medication in Vulnerable Populations

(People with dementia and people with intellectual disability)

The College of Psychiatrists proposes that Neuroleptic Medications should only be prescribed in vulnerable populations by specialists with appropriate training and competencies.

Summary

- Vulnerable people can present with behavioural change that cause problems for themselves and or others for many reasons.
- In people with intellectual disability such behaviours are known as behaviours that challenge, to indicate that they are a response to internal and/or external factors that need full elucidation by clinicians in order to develop a plan to help the person in dealing with these factors so that they may live a fulfilled life.
- In dementia care these are now referred to as responsive behaviours. This gives weight to the understanding that the individual responds to factors within themselves and in their external environment by behaving in a way that seems appropriate to them at that time.
- With the financial restraints that currently apply to service providers it is unavoidable that vulnerable people will lack appropriate supports and environments and will present with psychological distress and behaviours that challenge as a result. This is not satisfactory.
- When a person presents with behaviours that challenge, assessments and interventions should be multi-disciplinary.
- Psychotropic medication is indicated in certain circumstances for which clinical research evidence exists but should never be used in the medium to long-term solely for sedation.
- Psychotropic Medication should only be prescribed for vulnerable adults by specially trained and competent doctors except in extreme emergencies.

- Psychotropic medications should only be prescribed to vulnerable people as part of a multi-modal treatment plan of which medication is only a part.
- Resources must be provided to minimise environmental effects on the mental health of vulnerable people.
- There is an onus on Psychiatrists to advocate for appropriate vocational, recreational and socialisation supports for their patients.
- All Psychiatrists regularly audit their practice in line with international standards as required by the Medical Practitioners Act.
- The Capacity Act must be brought to fruition as a matter of urgency to protect vulnerable adults and to aid carers and clinicians in providing the best supports to vulnerable adults.

The College of Psychiatrists is aware of recent discussions in the media on the use of psychotropic medications in Irish populations with dementia and intellectual disability with concern. These medications have an important part to play in maximising the quality of life of individuals with certain conditions in certain circumstances. There is a clinical research evidence base for such use. However these medications also may have serious side effects and the decision to prescribe them must always be done by doctors who are aware of the full range of risks and benefits and able to weigh these to the benefit of their patients. Preferably decisions to prescribe such medications in vulnerable populations should be done with the input of clinicians of other relevant disciplines (e.g. Psychology, Pharmacy, Nursing) and, if the patient does not have capacity to consent to the administration of medication, family and other carers should be involved.

The College is aware of the lack of specialist input across the country to meet the needs of vulnerable patients. A Vision for Change outlines the needs of vulnerable people (i.e. People with intellectual disability and people with dementia) with mental health and/or behavioural problems. The College welcomes the commitment of the current government to the implementation of this national policy but must highlight again its disquiet at the slow rate of progress especially in relation to vulnerable populations.

Psychiatrists are always cognisant of the effect of environments and the need for meaningful activities and relationships for individuals to prevent mental health/ behavioural problems. It is an ethical duty of Psychiatrists to alleviate distress and to advocate for meaningful supports for their

patients to live as fulfilled a life as possible. The College is aware of deficits in resources to support vulnerable populations in living meaningful lives and continues to advocate through its members and as a College for appropriate resources that will reduce the stresses that can lead to mental illness and/or behaviours that challenge in vulnerable populations. Under the financial restraints that currently apply to service providers it seems unavoidable that vulnerable people will lack appropriate supports and environments and will present with psychological distress as a result. This is not satisfactory.

The College is very concerned about the delay in the development of the Capacity Bill. Much good work has gone into producing a Bill but if the current Oireachtas term ends without the enactment of a Capacity Act to give legislative powers that promote decision making in a person centred manner then we may have to wait for several more years for the current out of date legislation to be replaced.

Finally the College welcomes the statement of Minister Kathleen Lynch to the effect that closer monitoring of the use of psychotropic medications in vulnerable populations will be put in place. The College would be glad to take part in any development that will improve the safeguards for vulnerable people.

The College of Psychiatrists of Ireland is the professional body for psychiatrists in Ireland.

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