Mirtazapine reduces social anxiety and improves quality of life in women with social phobia


Q Does mirtazapine improve symptoms and quality of life in women with social phobia?

METHODS

Design: Randomised controlled trial.
Allocation: Concealed.
Blinding: Double blind.
Follow up period: 10 weeks.
Setting: General population, Germany; September to December 2004.
Patients: 66 women with social phobia (DSM-IV). Exclusions: <18 years old; psychosis; severe major depressive episode; pregnancy; not using contraception; psychotherapy; suicidal; abusing drugs or alcohol; other illness; or current use of mirtazapine or other psychotropics.
Intervention: Mirtazapine (30 mg/day); placebo.
Outcomes: Social anxiety (Social Phobia Inventory (SPIN); Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS)); quality of life (SF-36 Health Survey).
Patient follow up: 89% at 10 weeks.

MAIN RESULTS

At 10 weeks, mirtazapine improved symptoms of social anxiety compared with placebo in women with social phobia (difference in score change between mirtazapine and placebo: SPIN 8.1, 95% CI −9.6 to 4.1; p<0.001; LSAS −20.2, 95% CI −27.5 to −4.1; p<0.001). Mirtazapine also improved general health perceptions, vitality, social functioning, and mental health, and reduced role limitations due to emotional problems (p<0.001 for all; see http://www.ebmentalhealth.com/supplemental for table). There was no significant difference between mirtazapine and placebo in the physical aspects of quality of life (p>0.05; see http://www.ebmentalhealth.com/supplemental for table).

CONCLUSIONS

Mirtazapine reduces symptoms of social anxiety and improves quality of life in women with social phobia.

Commentary

Several medications have shown efficacy for the treatment of social phobia. So far, the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are recommended as first line treatment considering the evidence for safety and tolerability, ability to treat comorbid conditions, and stability of the effect size estimate shown across studies.1 2 The efficacy and safety of mirtazapine, with a mode of action different from currently available antidepressants, has been established in people with depressive disorder.3 4 Positive results from pilot studies of mirtazapine for the treatment of anxiety disorders have indicated potential for this medication.3 5 Muehlbacher et al present the first randomised, placebo controlled study of mirtazapine in people with social phobia. Mirtazapine shows rapid and credible effects and is relatively well tolerated. It lacks the side effects common with the SSRIs, such as sexual and sleep disturbances and nausea, which may affect patients’ motivation to complete treatment. The overall response rate and the change score of the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale appears comparable to the reduction found with paroxetine and fluvoxamine.1 Their findings suggest that mirtazapine could be an additional medication option for social phobia.

The effect of mirtazapine in this study is, however, representative of short term gains in young female non-psychiatric patients. Whether mirtazapine could be a credible option in clinical practice depends on if the results could be replicated in psychiatric samples that usually present with higher rates of comorbid symptoms and personality disorders, and in samples including both men and women with a wider age range. Moreover, it is important to evaluate the long term effects of the medication, which would provide further knowledge of the influence of side effects (such as sedation and weight gain) on treatment compliance.

Ewa Mörberg, PhD
Karolinska Institute, Department of Clinical Neuroscience, Section of Psychiatry, St Göran, Stockholm, Sweden

Mirtazapine reduces social anxiety and improves quality of life in women with social phobia

Evid Based Mental Health 2006 9: 75
doi: 10.1136/ebmh.9.3.75

Updated information and services can be found at:
http://ebmh.bmj.com/content/9/3/75

These include:

**Supplementary Material**
Supplementary material can be found at:
http://ebmh.bmj.com/content/suppl/2006/07/24/9.3.75.DC1.html

**References**
This article cites 4 articles, 0 of which you can access for free at:
http://ebmh.bmj.com/content/9/3/75#BIBL

**Email alerting service**
Receive free email alerts when new articles cite this article. Sign up in the box at the top right corner of the online article.

**Topic Collections**
Articles on similar topics can be found in the following collections

- Other phobias (49)
- Social phobia (53)
- Depressive disorder (570)
- Neurology (1070)
- Clinical trials (epidemiology) (989)
- Epidemiology (1570)

**Notes**

To request permissions go to:
http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions

To order reprints go to:
http://journals.bmj.com/cgi/reprintform

To subscribe to BMJ go to:
http://group.bmj.com/subscribe/