Review: new generation antipsychotic drugs may reduce relapse rates more effectively than conventional antipsychotic drugs in people with schizophrenia


What is the potential of new generation antipsychotic drugs to improve adherence and decrease relapse rates in people with schizophrenia?

METHODS

Design: Systematic review with meta-analysis.

Data sources: Medline (1996–April 2001), Current Contents (January 2001–May 2001) and the Cochrane Schizophrenia Group’s trial register (to July 2002); hand searches of bibliographies and contact with pharmaceutical companies.

Study selection and analysis: Randomised controlled trials, reporting on relapse rates and of at least 6 months’ duration, comparing new generation antipsychotics with placebo or conventional antipsychotics in people with schizophrenia or schizophrenia-like psychoses. Data were extracted on relapse, dropout following adverse effects and overall treatment failure (defined as the number of people who relapsed, dropped out for any reason, or suffered an adverse event).

Outcomes: Relapse rates, dropout rates, and overall treatment failure.

MAIN RESULTS

Seventeen studies of 7 different new generation antipsychotic drugs met inclusion criteria (3015 participants). There was considerable heterogeneity among studies, particularly in study design, clinical characteristics of the participants, and criteria used to assess relapse and adherence. This reduces the reliability of the meta-analysis. Because there were few trials for individual drugs, the effects of new generation antipsychotics as a group were analysed. The new generation antipsychotics significantly reduced relapse rates and risk of overall treatment failure when compared with both placebo and conventional antipsychotics. There was no significant difference in dropout rates due to adverse events between groups (see table).

CONCLUSIONS

As a group, new generation antipsychotic drugs were more effective in preventing relapse and overall treatment failure, than both placebo and conventional drugs.

Table 1 Results of new generation antipsychotic drugs compared with placebo and conventional antipsychotic drugs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compared with placebo</th>
<th>Compared with conventional antipsychotic drugs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New generation antipsychotic drugs (n = 653)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relapse rates 104 (16%)</td>
<td>109 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall treatment failures 279 (43%)</td>
<td>237 (72%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop out rates 50 (8%)</td>
<td>34 (10%)</td>
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</table>
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