The dangers of antipsychotics in Autoimmune Encephalitis

“Autoimmune Encephalitis is refractory to antipsychotics; indeed, antipsychotic agents make affected patients much worse, even to the point of developing something akin to neuroleptic malignant syndrome.” Reports Dr. Josep Dalmau who identified the first antibody, anti-NMDAr, in autoimmune encephalitis in 2007.

IAES has compiled a reference list of research that explains why clinicians should not give antipsychotic dopamine antagonist medications, such as Risperdal (risperidone), Haldol, to Autoimmune Encephalitis Patients. See quotes from these key papers and what researchers suggest should be prescribed when dealing with neuropsychiatric symptoms.

REPORTING FROM THE ECNP CONGRESS- January 15, 2019

BARCELONA – Consider the possibility of an autoantibody-related etiology in all cases of first-onset psychosis, Josep Dalmau, MD, PhD, urged at the annual congress of the European College of Neuropsychopharmacology.

“There are patients in our clinics all of us – neurologists and psychiatrists – are missing. These patients are believed to have psychiatric presentations, but they do not. They are autoimmune,” said Dr. Dalmau, professor of neurology at the University of Barcelona.

Dr. Dalmau urged psychiatrists to become familiar with the red flags suggestive of synaptic autoimmunity as the underlying cause of first-episode, out-of-the-blue psychosis.

“If you have a patient with a classical presentation of schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, you probably won’t find antibodies,” according to the neurologist.
It’s important to have a high index of suspicion, because anti–NMDA receptor encephalitis is treatable with immunotherapy. And firm evidence shows that earlier recognition and treatment lead to improved outcomes. Also, the disorder is refractory to antipsychotics; indeed, antipsychotic agents make affected patients much worse, even to the point of developing something akin to neuroleptic malignant syndrome.”

References –

The Diagnosis and Treatment of Autoimmune Encephalitis (2016, January 12)
Eric Lancaster

“Intoxications such a neuroleptic malignant syndrome and serotonin syndrome may often present with similarities to autoimmune encephalitis. Conversely, patients with anti-NMDAR encephalitis may develop psychosis as an initial symptom and be treated with neuroleptics, then later show catatonia, rigidity, autonomic instability and altered level of consciousness; this pattern of findings may be mistaken for neuroleptic malignant syndrome. Autoimmune encephalitis therefore should enter into the differential diagnosis of any case of suspected neuroleptic malignant syndrome (Patients with anti-NMDAR encephalitis may be particularly sensitive to strong dopamine antagonists, and our group attempts to avoid using these medications).”

Clinical experience and laboratory investigations in patients with anti-NMDAR encephalitis (2011, August 19)

Prof Josep Dalmau, MD, Eric Lancaster, MD, Eugenia Martinez-Hernandez, MD, Prof Myrna R Rosenfeld, MD, and Prof Rita Balice-Gordon, PhD

“Studies investigating the effects of phencyclidine and ketamine (non-competitive antagonists of NMDARs) in human beings show that these drugs induce behaviours that are much the same as the positive and negative symptoms of schizophrenia, along with repetitive oro-facial and limb movements, autonomic instability, and seizures”

“The profile of symptoms caused by antagonists of NMDAR is dose dependent and varies in much the same way as the multistage clinical course of anti-NMDAR encephalitis does. At low doses, NMDAR antagonists cause psychosis, agitation, memory disturbance, and decreased responsiveness to pain, and at higher doses they cause dissociative anaesthesia, a state of profound unresponsiveness with catatonic features, and coma”

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3158385/


Sarkis RA, Coffey MJ, Cooper JJ, Hassan I, Lennox B

Of the patients with documented exposure to antipsychotics, 33% were suspected to have an adverse drug reaction (notably, neuroleptic malignant syndrome in 22% of the cases).

CONCLUSIONS:
On the basis of these findings, it is important to consider anti-NMDAR encephalitis in the differential diagnosis of patients with an acute onset psychosis, especially in association with agitation, catatonia, or adverse response to antipsychotics. Furthermore, it is important to use antipsychotics with caution in patients with suspected or confirmed anti-NMDAR encephalitis.

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30561283/?fbclid=IwAR1kSieN61wFduhcr_p1DaXKxjV4Cej2oNKIXbl9GPQZRVnVi4EjyaQtuE
Pollak TA, Al-Diwani AAJ, Lennox B.

“In terms of psychiatric treatment, there is mounting evidence that patients with NMDAR antibody encephalitis may respond poorly to antipsychotic treatment, with high rates of rhabdomyolysis and even development of a neuroleptic malignant syndrome (NMS)-type. For this reason, benzodiazepines are preferred for initial management of behavioral disturbance and catatonia. If antipsychotics are required, sedating atypical antipsychotics such as olanzapine may be preferable.”

The development of extrapyramidal symptoms (EPS) when placed on antipsychotics should alert the team to consider this diagnosis. Of course, EPS is a known side effect of antipsychotics, but is just another reminder to consider the possibility of Autoimmune Encephalitis.

Delayed recognition of the disease can result in inadequate use of neuroleptics. Patients who develop psychosis as an initial symptom may be treated with neuroleptics, then later show catatonia, rigidity, autonomic instability and altered level of consciousness and possible coma; this pattern of findings may be mistaken for neuroleptic malignant syndrome. Patients with anti-NMDAR encephalitis may be particularly sensitive to strong dopamine antagonist medications such as Risperdal (risperidone), Haldol and these should be avoided. For this reason, benzodiazepines are preferred for initial management of behavioral disturbance and catatonia in suspected autoimmune encephalitis.

Autoimmune encephalitis therefore should enter into the differential diagnosis of any case of suspected/new onset of possible Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome (especially if the Creatine Kinase (CK) is normal, or CK normalizes after treatment, but without improvement)

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5311041/

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https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3158385/

Autoimmune encephalitis in psychiatric institutions: current perspectives (2016, October 27)

Chloe Bost, Olivier Pascual, and Jérôme Honnorat

Treatments should not hide disease evolution neither worsen symptoms. They advised to choose atypical and more sedative antipsychotics rather than typical antipsychotics as dopamine antagonists that aggravate agitation, in order to treat psychotic symptoms. To treat mood
symptoms, valproic acid was advised for sedation, sleep, and seizure benefits and thanks to the availability of an intravenous form. Uses of lithium and benzodiazepines are also reported in the literature but do not cause significant changes.

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5089825/