

World Mental Health Day: Adverse Drug Effects and Suicide

Adverse drug effects can sometimes be misdiagnosed as signs of mental illness

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We need to have meaningful public conversations about adverse drug effects and mental health. Lives can be saved when people are well informed.”

Wendy Dolin, MISSD

in Memory of Stewart Dolin, (MISSD) is increasing public awareness of adverse drug effects that can impact mental health and cognitive functioning.

“Given that many different drugs carry FDA and pharmaceutical company warnings stating they can increase the risk of suicidality, it is important that health care consumers and caregivers carefully read all patient information leaflets and be aware of adverse drug effects that can precipitate suicide,” said Dolin.

Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors or SSRIs are one class of drugs that carry the FDA black box warning of possible increased risks of suicidality for ages 24 and under. Commonly prescribed as antidepressants, some SSRIs are best known by their brand names in the US such as Prozac, Zoloft and Paxil.

“While the public is increasingly aware of FDA black box warnings on SSRIs, other drugs can also adversely impact our mental health, many of which are not prescribed for mental health challenges,” said Dolin. “These include some medications for asthma, malaria, and acne.”

One adverse drug effect that has been linked to suicidality is called akathisia. Akathisia is a disorder, induced as a side effect of medications, which can cause a person to experience such intense inner restlessness that the sufferer is driven to violence and/or suicide.

MISSD offers a free, 1-hour, accredited online [Akathisia 101 course](#) open to all. Two [MISSD public service videos](#) also provide akathisia info. Consumers and caregivers should watch for and report any unusual changes in behavior when starting, stopping or changing dosage or type of certain medications. Possible symptoms include agitation, insomnia, memory problems, aggressiveness, bad or vivid dreams, increased anxiety, hallucinations and suicidal thoughts and actions.

“We need to have meaningful public conversations about adverse drug effects and mental health. Lives can be saved when people are well informed,” said Dolin.

Wendy Dolin

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