



HEAR US



**Croydon User Council
Meeting at: Fairfield Club
1.30 – 4 pm 6th May 2008**

ITEM	ACTION	WHO
1.	WELCOME INTRODUCTIONS, APOLOGIES & HOUSE RULES:	
	Welcome and house rules by HUV. No apologies.	
2.	Q AND A SESSION BY AZIZAH (SLAM PHARMACIST	
	Q. What do patients need to know about herbal medications, do they work, and are they safe?	
	There are lots of herbal medications available which can be useful but they can't be prescribed. This is because they differ between each manufacturer, and even between each tablet in a bottle, in the amounts of active ingredient. This makes it difficult to work out the correct dosage for them.	
	St John's Wort does have a lot of side-effects, but it can be prescribed in some cases. Trials of it shows that it does work well compared to other anti-depressants but the side effects it causes are just as severe, or worse than, those from other drugs.	
	In conjunction with some other drugs it can cause serotonin syndrome (liver damage) and has hospitalised some patients.	
	It is best to speak to your doctor/ psychiatrist before you try any herbal medications to make sure that they won't be affected by other drugs you might be taking.	
	Q. Medication on leaving Bethlem - why do hospital staff generally prescribe the same few drugs when there are many others available?	
	Treatments are given as to what generally works best in trials and evidence for how they work best. There is not as much research, evidence for psychiatric treatments as for medication for other illnesses, and there are not many treatments which are available at all.	
	However, when in crisis, hospital staff may put patients who are (hypo) manic on multiple treatments at first to alleviate this. When the patient is stabilised the number of medications used can be replaced.	



Medications may also be changed over the longer term, as patients are not usually in hospital long enough for staff to see the long-term results of treatment. In-patient care is really emergency care to get patients well enough to be able to leave and to be able to get home.

Q. Side effects of medication - sex and fertility

Sexual dysfunction is a very common side-effect especially with anti-depressants, although it is often not reported.

Pregnancy can affect many mental disorders and can cause changes in mood. There are very few medicines in psychiatry where a pregnancy would have to be stopped because of the effects of medication, but doctors should be made aware as soon as a patient becomes pregnant or is trying to become pregnant. In pregnancy, normal considerations such as diet, folic acid supplements etc are just as important for mental health patients as anyone else.

Not much known about effect on men's fertility of psychiatric medication.

Q. How should patients handle coming off sleeping tablets if they have been taking them for a long time?

Sleeping tablets such as Zopiclone have no effect after around 2 weeks. After this use, the effects are solely psychological and patients can become addicted to them. However, even if a patient is psychologically dependant then many doctors will carry on prescribing them due to the worries of not sleeping properly affecting a patient's mental health.

If addicted to sleeping pills and a patient wants to come off them, then the best remedy is to change to a longer-acting drug for which the dosage can be reduced over a much longer time frame.

Zopiclone use in the long-term can cause causes a hangover effect which can affect balance with increased age, and could rarely lead to injuries through falls.

Q. Why do so many medications cause weight gain, and what can you do about it?

Three main factors in combating weight gain caused by medication:

- Warn patients
- Weigh patients regularly
- Walking - exercise

Anti-psychotics and some other medications are associated with weight gain because they can make you very sleepy, and so less active. Some



medications can cause a dry mouth which makes patients thirsty and so drink more fizzy drinks.

Some also increase appetite and also stop ability to feel full. Some also cause salt or carbohydrate cravings which can cause weight gain.

The only real way of combating this is for patients to monitor weight carefully and to try to stay active. Patients should be made more aware of the chance of weight gain and encouraged to take care that they don't start to put on weight as it is harder to lose it afterwards. There is also the risk of diabetes and other conditions which could carry on even when an overweight person has gone back to being a normal weight.

Q. For how long can patients expect to be taking medication?

This varies widely from person to person. Studies have shown that for patients diagnosed with schizophrenia, four out of five will relapse if they stop taking their medication. The chance of relapse also increases with the number of previous relapses.

Certain medicines, such as Clozapine and Lithium need to be taken for longer before the treatment has any beneficial effects.

It is generally accepted that no patient should reduce their medication until they have been free from relapse on their current medication for at least a year.

Q. How common is hair loss as a medication side-effect?

Hair loss as a side effect but not very common but it can happen. However, hair does usually grow back in time.

Q. I have a blood test every week since been put on Clozapine. Why do they have to be so frequent?

Clozapine is a useful drug as it often works when other medication has not. It can cause a lot of side effects, especially weight gain. Rarely it can affect white blood cell count and function so when it has been newly prescribed; more blood tests need to be made for the first four months to monitor this.

Q. I have been told that by my dentist that gum bleeding and other problems are a side-effect of taking sodium valproate. Is this true, and what can be done about it?



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This is not a side effect of sodium valproate at all. However, taking some SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) dispensed for bipolar disorder can increase bleeding generally in some patients, and this effect can increase with age.

Q. Drugs and alcohol: how bad for you are they if taking psychiatric medication with them?

There are very few psychiatric drugs that can't be taken with alcohol in moderation. However, this must be in moderation as alcohol causes very serious changes in mood, especially in excess.

Some medication can also increase the risk of seizures, which is made worse by excessive alcohol use.

Cannabis has been found to greatly increase the relapse rate for patients diagnosed with schizophrenia. Not much is known so far about its effects on other psychiatric disorders.

Q. Does taking psychiatric medication mean you are unable to drive?

Few medicines where you are unable to drive at all because of the medication. However, patients will have varying degrees of side-effects to medication which may affect their driving, and so you should always speak to a doctor/pharmacist or other health professional when you start new medication or change dosage to discuss whether you will be able to drive safely.

Thyroid medicines

T3 - has similar results to lithium in terms of remission, especially at bigger doses and where other meds would affect thyroid.

Q. Is diazepam still prescribed; how difficult is it to come off?

Diazepam is now prescribed only as a tranquiliser. After a long period patients will be addicted to it. It is possible to come off it safely, but this needs to be done slowly over a long period. If you have been on diazepam for a long time it is best to see your doctor or psychiatrist about reducing dosage.

Azizah was thanked by everyone present for giving such an interesting talk.

2. NEXT CUC OPEN MEETING - TUESDAY 1ST JULY 2008, FAIRFIELD CLUB



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CROYDON USER COUNCIL

HUC - The next CUC open meeting will be held at 1pm on Tuesday 1st July 2008 at the Fairfield Club. Hear Us need as many of their members to attend at possible as we need to pass the organisation's new constitution so we can put forward our application to become a charity. There will be some sort of party organised to take place afterwards, at the Fairfield Club.

Minutes Signed off by Chair.		
Name:	Signature:	Date:



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MEETING TYPE	DATE	TIME	VENUE
Closed	Tuesday 1st April	1 – 4 pm	Hear Us Office
Open To All	Tuesday 6th May	1 – 4 pm	Fairfield Club
Closed	Tuesday 3 rd June	1 – 4 pm	Hear Us Office
Open To All	Tuesday 1st July	1 – 4 pm	Fairfield Club
Closed	Tuesday 5 th August	1 – 4 pm	Hear Us Office
Open: AGM*	Tuesday 2nd September	1 – 4 pm	TBC
Closed	Tuesday 7 th October	1 – 4 pm	Hear Us Office
Open To All	Tuesday 4th November	1 – 4 pm	TBC
Closed	Tuesday 2 nd December	1 – 4 pm	Hear Us Office

Please send apologies to Tim Oldham or Robert Yaxley 020 8681 6888
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