

Trends in Pharmacotherapy for Anxiety, Depression and Insomnia During COVID-19: A North York Area Pilot Study.

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: During the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of social-distancing regulation, there is an increased concern around the mental health of the general population, including depression and anxiety. Mental health prescribing trends in Canada during COVID-19, at the time of writing, have not been investigated.

Methods: This pilot study collected refill information of 365 patients from a independent community pharmacy in Greater Toronto Area to compare (1) initiation, (2) dose change, (3) dispensing frequency and (4) defined daily dose (DDD) of first-line antidepressants as defined by CANMAT and other select medications including Z-drugs and benzodiazepines. Data from January 1 to May 31 of 2019 were compared with data from January 1 to May 31 of 2020.

Results: The number of newly initiated antidepressant medications in 2020 was not significantly affected when compared to 2019 ($Z=-1.149$, $p=0.251$). Upon investigation of logistic regression, age was significantly correlated to antidepressant initiation in 2019 ($p=0.038$) while in 2020, there was no significant correlation with age ($p=0.081$). There was a significant difference in the number of dose changes which occurred between 2019 and 2020, showing significantly more increases and switches of therapy ($p=0.08$). There was significantly more frequent dispensing of benzodiazepine tablets ($Z=02.402$, $p=0.016$) in the first five months of 2020 compared to those of 2019. There were no statistically significant changes in the number of DDDs.

Discussion: There are shifting trends in mental health prescribing. This result is concerning during a time when accessing appropriate mental healthcare is so significantly impacted. Pharmacists will be essential in ensuring appropriate triage, counselling and follow-up.