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Safe Medication Considerations in the Older Adult Population

Gigi Lim

The University of Auckland, New Zealand

Background and Aim: Adverse drug events are especially prominent in the older adult population for a variety of reasons and as a result, special attention is required to provide the safest possible care to this population group. This review aims to enhance nurses understanding of drugs that are highly likely to cause adverse drug effects in the older adult population.

Methods: Literature from MEDLINE and CINAHL databases was retrieved and appropriate articles selected for further review. Relevant references from bibliographies, Google scholar, MEDSAFE and the British National Formulary also provided additional information.

Results: Medications identified that commonly results to an adverse effects in the older adult population were antidepressants, atypical antipsychotics, cholinesterase inhibitors, benzodiazepines and statins. Dosing parameters found were specific to older patients and pharmacokinetic changes in renal and hepatic function accounted for these figures and justified certain choices of medications within a class. Each class of medication had a specific set of common adverse effects and more serious adverse drug effects such as falls, cerebrovascular adverse events and rhabdomyolysis were associated with some medications.

Conclusion: Safe medication management can only be achieved in the older population with an awareness of the common problems that arise with the use of specific drugs. Adequate pharmacovigilance involves early identification of adverse effects and appropriate dosing and monitoring of treatment.