



Ten General Principles for the Use of Psychiatric Medications

Note: This document is from Nardacci, D.E.: "Overview of Psychiatric Medications." New York: Center for Urban Community Services In-Service Training, 2001

- 1. Psychiatric medications can make a substantial difference in quality of life for an individual with mental illness by:**
 - Decreasing the need for hospitalization
 - Enhancing community adaptation
 - Reducing hallucinations, delusional thinking, anxiety, depression, and other specific symptoms of mental illness
 - Improving work/vocational functioning
 - Improving socialization
- 2. The ideal medication would work on all the target symptoms without causing unwanted side effects- unfortunately, truly ideal medications do not exist.**

Side effects of medication vary in seriousness and severity.

- Many side effects are uncomfortable and/or annoying but not acutely dangerous (dry mouth, constipation, dizziness, sedation, weight gain, tremor, rigidity, restlessness, etc.)
 - Other side effects are potentially very serious, even life threatening (agranulocytosis with Clozaril, acute Lithium toxicity, or neuroleptic malignant syndrome)
- 3. Choosing medications involves carefully weighing the potential risks against the potential benefits and striking the optimal balance between the two.**
 - 4. Medication choices are made on the basis of multiple factors:**
 - Diagnosis
 - Targeted symptoms
 - Potential side effects/tolerance
 - Medical condition
 - Other current medications
 - Past medication experience
 - Drug-abuse history
 - Patient preference
 - 5. Treatment must be individualized for the following reasons:**
 - Certain medications work better for certain people

Note: This document is included within the *Supportive Services* section of CSH's *Toolkit for Developing and Operating Supportive Housing*, which is available at www.csh.org/toolkit2. This document has been adapted from CSH's publication *Developing the "Support" in Supportive Housing*, which is available at www.csh.org/publications.

- Different people need different doses of medication to get the best response
 - People get different side effects from the same medications and vary in their ability to tolerate them
 - People may respond differently to the same medication at different times depending on the natural course of their illness, psychosocial stresses in their lives, or interactions with other medications they may be taking
 - Optimal treatment response sometimes requires the use of multiple medications simultaneously
- 6. Medication management is an ongoing process that benefits from focused observation by all members of the service team as well as front desk, maintenance, and other housing staff. Staff should be able to:**
- Determine whether the desired clinical response is occurring
 - Describe the nature of the person’s response to the medication accurately and in detail
 - Monitor for unwanted side effects and signs of medication toxicity
- 7. People benefit from direct positive feedback about changes in their behavior and day-to-day functioning observed by staff.**
- 8. Focused psycho-education for people taking psychiatric medication is imperative to achieve optimal results and improve long-term compliance.**
- Individuals need to have realistic expectations about what medications can and cannot do
 - Individuals need to learn about potential side effects in a manner that will not stir up unnecessary anxiety and foster noncompliance
 - Individuals need to understand how the medications are likely to help them with their own lives, in practical and constructive terms
 - Individuals need help dealing with the stigma of having mental illness and taking psychiatric medications
 - Individuals should be encouraged and assisted (if necessary) to talk with their doctors about the positive and negative effects of medication
- 9. Medication noncompliance is a serious issue that impacts treatment outcome and community adjustment. Active ongoing intervention by staff members is necessary to reinforce compliance.**
- 10. Communication between the treating psychiatrist and service staff is critical for the following reasons:**
- Some individuals will want to stop taking medications, even if they have been doing well
 - Denial of mental illness is the most common reason for noncompliance
 - Unpleasant side effects can also impact compliance
 - Enhancing an individual’s acceptance of his/her mental illness and awareness of the positive benefits of medications are effective in promoting further compliance
 - Staff support, encouragement, and supervision are necessary to assure the compliance of individuals who do not easily accept that they need psychiatric medications