

Psychiatric Disorders and Psychotropics in 100 Terminal Cancer Patients

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Background

- Psychiatric disorders, including delirium, are severe and frequent complications in terminal cancer.
- However, few studies analyzed the actual prevalence of psychiatric disorders and the use of psychotropics in this population, where the psychiatrist could play a significant role.
- Psychiatric disorders have a major impact on quality of death.

Objective

To describe the prevalence of psychiatric disorders and the use of psychotropics in a cohort of terminal cancer patients.

Methods

Chart review of a consecutive cohort of 100 patients in a 15-bed hospice in Canada (Maison Michel-Sarrazin), during a 5-month period (May to September 2008) from admission until death.

Table 1: Characteristics of 100 patients

Mean age (years)	68.7
Mean length of stay (day)	13.9
Sex (woman)	53.0%
References in psycho-oncology	16.0%
Primary cancer site	
Respiratory tract (trachea, bronchus, lungs)	26.0%
Digestive system and pleural	21.0%
Colorectal	13.0%
Breast	5.0%
Prostate	5.0%
Other	30.0%
Brain metastases	19.0%

Table 2: Frequency of prevailing and incident psychiatric disorders

Psychiatric disorders	Previous history or at admission (%)	During stay (%)
None	22	50
Delirium – Formal diagnosis	38	38
Significant delirium symptoms		76
Anxiety disorders	17	5
Depressive disorders	2	0
Sleeping disorders	6	5
Others	8	1

- Higher mean daily dosages of antipsychotics, in haloperidol mg. equivalent, were observed :
 - In patients with incident delirium (4.65 mg) vs without delirium (2.02 mg) ($p < 0.005$)
 - In patients with any psychiatric disorder (2.61 mg) vs without any psychiatric disorder (0.98 mg) ($p = 0.03$)
- There was no significant difference in dosage of benzodiazepines in patients with vs. without any psychiatric disorder.

Results

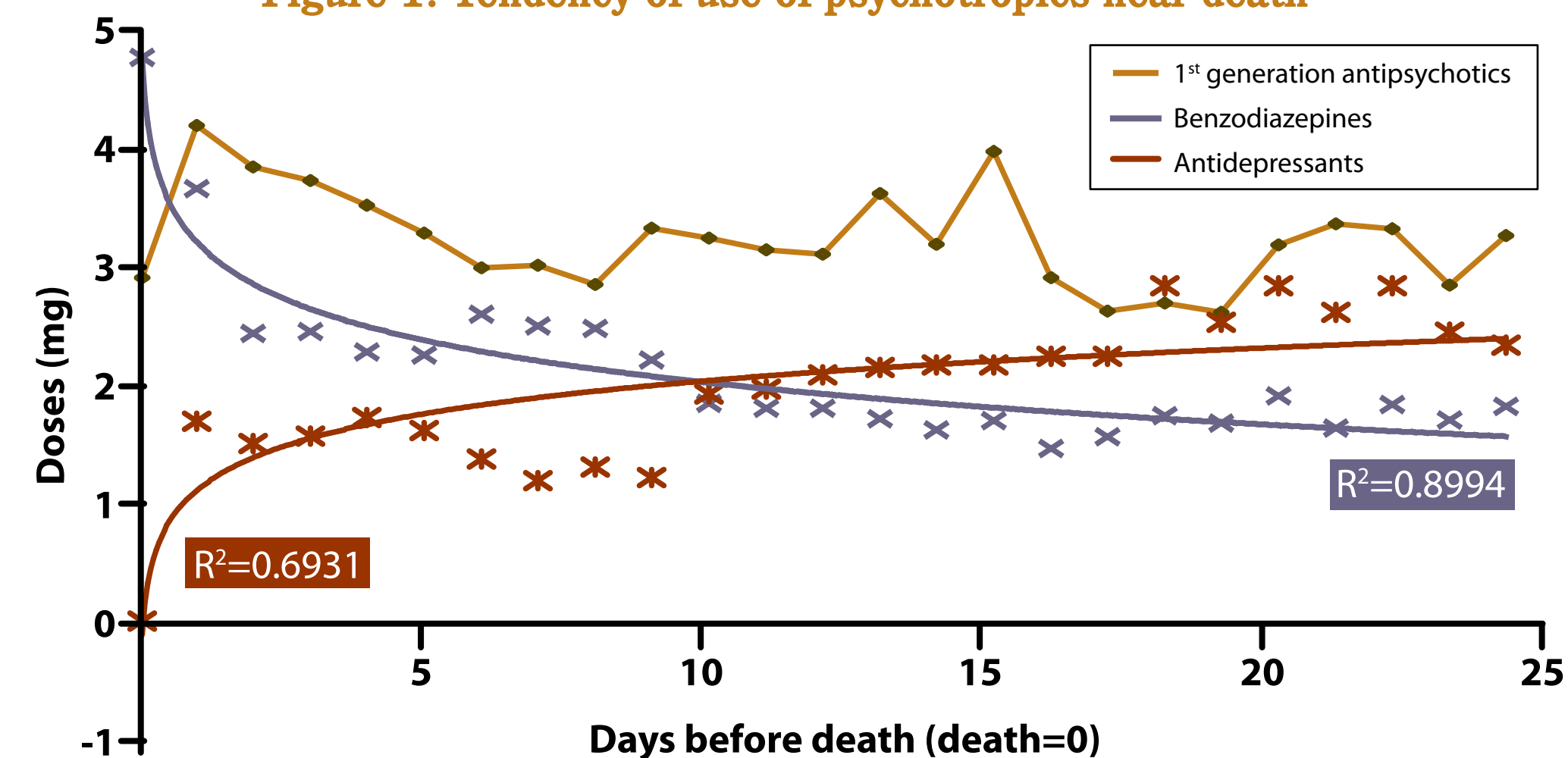
Table 3: Use of psychotropics

Psychotropics	Delirium (%)	Anxiety disorders (%)	Depressive disorders (%)	Nausea/vomiting (%)	Sleeping disorders (%)	Others (%)	Frequency of use (% of patients)
1 st generation antipsychotics	45.6	9.4		20.8	13.1	11.1	94
2 nd generation antipsychotics	12.1	12.1	43.4	3.0		29.4	13
Benzodiazepines	0.2	33.6			47.2	19.0	84
Antidepressants		58.2	29.4		7.5	4.9	17
Mood-stabilizing						100	12
All psychotropics	23.8	22.1	5.0	10.8	21.9	16.4	99

Table 4: Most frequently used antipsychotics and benzodiazepines

Medications	% of use (patient-days)	Mean daily dose (mg)
Haloperidol	65.8	3.3
Methotrimeprazine	28.8	27.7
Lorazepam	40.0	1.7
Oxazepam	7.5	20.3
Midazolam	0.7	11.3

Figure 1: Tendency of use of psychotropics near death



Conclusions

- Delirium was the most frequent diagnosis, with significant symptoms in three-fourth of patients.
- Major depression was lower than the prevalence reported previously.
- Benzodiazepines and antipsychotics, mainly haloperidol, were the most prescribed psychotropics, in dosage usually recommended in this population.



References

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