

Antipsychotics Linked to Higher Risk of Pneumonia in Alzheimer's Patients

Hello. This is Dr. Sonya Hardin, Program Director for the Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Program Grant at East Carolina University. Podcasts are being developed for primary care providers with topics in neurology. This short podcast is focused on antipsychotics, which have been linked to a higher risk of pneumonia in our Alzheimer's patient.

We know that people with Alzheimer's disease who take antipsychotic medications have twice the risk of pneumonia compared with people not taking antipsychotics, according to a recently published study in CHEST. Results showed that antipsychotic use was associated with a two-fold increased risk of pneumonia among patients with Alzheimer's.

The three most commonly used antipsychotics, quetiapine, risperidone, and haloperidol, all had similar associations with pneumonia risk. The researchers in this study concluded that antipsychotic use was associated with the risk of pneumonia regardless of age and regardless of treatment duration or the choice of that particular antipsychotic use.

Also, because this study included only cases of pneumonia that involved hospitalization or death, the actual risk increase may be even higher with our community-dwelling older adults. Therefore, it's recommended that clinicians carefully weigh the risk versus benefits when prescribing antipsychotics, and to make that treatment period for the antipsychotic as short as clinically possible.

In summary, people with Alzheimer's disease who take antipsychotics have twice the risk for pneumonia and, therefore, we hope that you will consider, as you're prescribing antipsychotics, to limit them as short as possible. This concludes the podcast for today. Thank you very much.