

Increasing Trends in Abuse of Gabapentin in Drug Addicts in Rural Population of Punjab

Sir,

Drug abuse has played constant havoc in our society destroying the social fabric and family system and burdening our already saturated healthcare system. With ever-increasing options of addictive compounds, drug addicts have been notorious for abusing prescribed drugs like diazepam in the near past.

Recently, the new drug, gabapentin, used to treat neuropathic pains, seizures, and mood disorders,¹ has become the target of abuse by drug addicts in rural areas of Punjab. Ever-increasing numbers of people with a history of abuse are being recorded in the primary healthcare system. Its low cost and availability without valid prescription of registered healthcare providers have led to increasing use of this drug by the addicts². This drug is mostly used by people who are already polydrug addicts. Several studies have been done in different parts of the world like America³ and Europe⁴ which have shown the abuse potential of this particular class of drugs and the rise in its injudicious use in addicted persons. Studies have shown that opioid addicts are more likely to use this drug as an alternative option and they describe its abuse as high as that of opioids (heroin) or marijuana.⁵ Mostly this drug is being taken at three to eight times the normal used dosage in clinical practice. At these doses, this can produce a sense of sleepiness and euphoria. The unnecessary use of this drug by the drug addicts has led to an increase in its price. All these factors are indicative of the high abuse potential of this drug in an already high-risk population.

To minimise the impact of this new public health threat, we should take early steps toward nipping off this evil in the bud. We should educate doctors to prescribe rationally this drug according to evidence-based medical practices and stop unnecessary prescriptions. We also need to curb pharmacies dispensing of over-the-counter drugs. Only by doing so, we can halt the spread of this new menace in our community.

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The authors declared no competing interest.

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MFA: Wrote the original draft and edited the manuscript.

AI: Searched literature reviews and edited the manuscript.

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