Antidepressants and Autism

John C C Chan

Objectives

• Rationale behind using antidepressants
• Usage & Evidence
• Issues

Antidepressants

• Used many years in Autism
• For anxiety, communication, repetitive beh.
• Causes akathesia, disinhibition, mood fluctuation.
Antidepressants

- SSRI
- Clomipramine
- Venlafaxine
- Mirtazepine

Rationale

- Serotonin in autism
- Elevated 5HT level (Schain et al. 1961)
- 25-30% hyperserotonemia (Cook et al. 1996)
- Reduction of Tryptophan intake increase autistic beh. (McDougle et al. 1996)
- 5HT synthesis disruption in (~5yo) ASD (Chugani 1999)

Rationale

- The relationship is still controversial
- Neurodevelopmental process?
- Neurotransmitter
- Neuro modulator
- 5HT transporter gene & DD/ASD (Murphy 2004) [controversial]
- Serotonin agents helpful sometimes
Clomipramine

- TCA good for
- OCD
- Trichotillomania
- Onychophagia
- Anxiety
- Depression

Clomipramine

- Single-blinded study (Gordon et al. 1992)
- Double-blinded study (Gordon et al. 1993)
- Clomipramine, not other TCA/placebo, improves compulsive behaviours, anger and uncooperativeness

Clomipramine

- Open label study shows positive effect on overall functioning (Brasic et al. 1994)
- Another open label study show behavioural benefits but TOO much adverse side effects (Sanchez et al. 1996)
- Serotonin syndrome for younger kids (Brasic et al. 1998)
Fluoxetine

- Some open label trials - effective
- Controlled trials in children & adolescents (Buchsbaum et al. 2001) (Hollander et al. 2005)
- Significant reduction in repetitive behaviours (Y-BOCS)

Fluoxetine

- Double-blind, placebo-controlled trial in adult (Hollander et al. 2007)
- Similar decrease in repetitive behaviours by Y-BOCS

Fluvoxamine

- Double-blind, placebo-controlled trial in adult (McDougle et al. 1996)
- Reduction in repetitive behaviours
- Reduction in aggression
Fluvoxamine

- Double-blind, placebo-controlled trial in children and adolescents (McDougle et al. 2000)
- Not significant in effect
- Side effects +++

Fluvoxamine

- Case studies for efficacy & Tolerability (Martin et al. 2003)
- No difference but with side effects

Paroxetine

- No trial
- Case report (2 to date)
- Side effect limits uses
- 10mg/day
- Increase dosage +++ Side effect
Citalopram

- Retrospective chart review children and adolescents (Namerow et al. 2003)
- Mixed outcome
- Large multicentre double-blind placebo-controlled trial for children & Adolescents (King et al. 2009) [NIH STAART]
- No difference

Escitalopram

- Open label study shows improvement in global functioning and reduction in irritability (Owley et al. 2005)
- NO control trials

Sertraline

- Open label adult study shows improvement in SIB and aggression (Hellings et al. 1996)
- Open label C&A study shows improvement in transitional behaviour (Steingard et al. 1997)
- Open label adult study shows improvement in aggression and DB (McDougle et al. 1998)
Venlafaxine

- Open label adult study shows improvement in repetitive behaviours (Hollander et al. 2000)
- No other significant study...

Mirtazepine

- Open label mixed age study shows improvement in aggression, SIB irritability & hyperactivity BUT not significant (Posey et al. 2001)
- Side effect +++

Conclusion

- Some efficacy in reduction on repetitive & Stereotyped behaviours in Autism
- Not much good clinical evidence for some of the agents
- Needs further studies