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10<sup>th</sup> January 2024

**Subject: Response to your article 'Britain's most dangerous prescription drug-linked to 400 deaths a year'**

Dear Editor,

On behalf of the College of Mental Health Pharmacy (CMHP), I am writing to respond to your article published on the 7<sup>th</sup> January 2024 to highlight the critical significance of clozapine in the treatment of individuals with treatment-resistant schizophrenia. As we strive to address the challenges associated with severe mental illnesses, it is imperative to recognize the life-saving potential of clozapine. We are concerned people taking clozapine may find the headline and article worrying and stop taking clozapine without consulting with their mental health care team. This could pose such patients serious harm.

Schizophrenia is a debilitating psychiatric disorder affecting millions of people worldwide. While many individuals respond well to conventional antipsychotics, a significant portion experience treatment resistance, wherein symptoms persist despite trials of multiple medications. This subset of patients often face profound challenges in daily functioning, leading to a considerable impact on their quality of life. Inequity between physical health and mental health and lack of research into schizophrenia has left limited treatment options.

Numerous clinical studies and real-world experiences attest to clozapine's unique efficacy in addressing symptoms that remain resistant to other medications. Clozapine has demonstrated superior effectiveness when compared to other antipsychotics, offering patients a chance at recovery when all else has failed. There are restrictions on its use to ensure it is used appropriately and safely.

One of the distinguishing features of clozapine is its impact on reducing the risk of suicidal behaviour among individuals with schizophrenia. Studies consistently show a significant decrease in suicide rates among patients treated with clozapine compared to other antipsychotic medications. This is particularly noteworthy, considering the elevated risk of suicide associated with treatment-resistant schizophrenia.

However, despite its undeniable efficacy, clozapine can cause serious adverse effects and it is imperative all health professionals involved in its prescribing, handling, management or supporting people taking clozapine fully understand the risks associated with its use. Patients (and where appropriate families and carers) must also be fully informed about the potential risks and adverse effects.

It is crucial to emphasize, with proper monitoring and adherence to established protocols, the risks associated with clozapine can be managed, and for the majority, benefits far outweigh the potential drawbacks.

Any death related to clozapine use is a tragedy. It is imperative deaths are learnt from, and every effort is made to improve safety in clozapine use. Healthcare professionals must



ensure every patient receives the correct monitoring at the right time, addressing and actioning concerns raised by patients, families and carers promptly.

Considering the ongoing efforts by health services across the country to improve mental health care and reduce the burden of treatment-resistant schizophrenia, it is essential to raise awareness about the life-saving potential of clozapine. Healthcare providers, policymakers, and the public should be informed about the evidence supporting the use of clozapine in improving outcomes for those with treatment-resistant schizophrenia.

Yours faithfully

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