



Letter to the Editor

The case against coprescribing opioids and antidepressants[☆]

We read with great interest the article by O'Connell and colleagues in *General Hospital Psychiatry* presenting, for the first time, detailed information on pharmacotherapy in the care of motor functional neurological disorder (mFND) patients [1]. The report strongly suggests that a substantial fraction of mFND patients receive antidepressants and opioids concurrently [1]. We wish the authors had elaborated further and more explicitly on this point.

Based on our own experiences in neurology and psychiatry, many clinicians are not fully aware of the fact that the combination of antidepressants and opioids may precipitate serotonin toxicity [2]. It is only recently that the Food and Drug Administration has issued a blanket safety communication and mandated changes to the labels of prescription opioids to warn about the risk of serotonin syndrome [3]. Moreover, new research findings indicating that prodrug opioids are less effective in patients on SSRIs have yet to be absorbed into clinical practice [4].

Considering the wide readership of *General Hospital Psychiatry* among clinicians and, in particular, junior medical staff, we think these are important points to make. Otherwise, many readers may come away from the article by O'Connell et al. [1] thinking that if these prescribing habits are frequently encountered at the South London and Maudsley (SLaM) NHS Foundation Trust, one of the premier psychiatric services in the world, they must surely be acceptable everywhere else.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

References

- [1] O'Connell N, Nicholson T, Blackman G, Tavener J, David AS. Medication prescriptions in 322 motor functional neurological disorder patients in a large UK mental health service: a case control study. *Gen Hosp Psychiatry* 2019;58:94–102.
- [2] Rastogi R, Swarm RA, Patel TA. Case scenario: opioid association with serotonin syndrome: implications to the practitioners. *Anesthesiology* 2011;115:1291–8.
- [3] Food and Drug Administration. Safety announcement [3-22-2016]. <https://www.fda.gov/media/96472/download>, Accessed date: 11 May 2019.
- [4] Parthipan A, Banerjee I, Humphreys K, Asch SM, Curtin C, Carroll I, et al. Predicting inadequate postoperative pain management in depressed patients: a machine learning approach. *PLoS One* 2019;14(2):e0210575.

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[☆] Comment on

Medication prescriptions in 322 motor functional neurological disorder patients in a large UK mental health service: A case control study.

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