

Antispasmodics Are Safe for Treating Irritable Bowel Patients Age 65 and Older in the Community

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Purpose: GI antispasmodics are generally not recommended for patients 65 years and older because of the perception that the elderly are particularly prone to the CNS side effects of these agents and their effectiveness at doses tolerated by this age group is questionable. This has not been our experience, but since HMO's and pharmacies recently have been rejecting or questioning such prescriptions in patients over 64 years, an outcomes study was undertaken to assess this bias against antispasmodics in the elderly.

Methods: An outcomes study was set up including all patients (pts) with IBS seen between 1/06-10/06 in our private clinical GI practice in Orlando, FL. Of 545 pts seen with IBS, 104 pts aged 65 and above were encountered, and their characteristics studied from chart review.

Results: 85% (88/104) of pts were much better after antispasmodic treatment. 12% (13/104) were somewhat better, and only 3% (3/104) were not any better. Medications used included hyoscyamine, elidinium/chlordiazepoxide, belladonna/phenobarbital and dicyclomine. Dosages were in the usual recommended adult dosage range. Side effects were rare, except for dry mouth (30%) and sleepiness (8%). Interestingly, 87% (90/104) of these pts were considered to suffer with significant stress, anxiety disorder or depression. 23% pts took medications for < 1 year, and 52% of the total population took medications for < 5 years. Of the pts with IBS who were over age 65, their symptoms began before age 35 in 9.6%, age 36-55 in 15.4%, age 56-65 in 27.9% and over age 65 in 47.1%.

Conclusion: 1. Antispasmodics and anticholinergics were extremely effective in 85% of pts and somewhat effective in 12%. 2. Antispasmodics were safe when used in this age group and side effects did not limit usage in this cohort, and were essentially those of dry mouth and rarely fatigue. 3. 87% of these pts had significant stress factors, anxiety disorder or depression. 4. Medication usage was usually short lived or intermittent in 75% of pts. 5. IBS symptoms began most commonly over age 65 in this cohort (47%) with 75% of pts developing symptoms over age 55.