

The Medical Letter[®]

on Drugs and Therapeutics

Volume 62

June 1, 2020

ISSUE No.
1599

IN THIS ISSUE

In Brief: Respiratory Depression with Gabapentinoids.....p 81

Important Copyright Message

FORWARDING OR COPYING IS A VIOLATION OF U.S. AND INTERNATIONAL COPYRIGHT LAWS

The Medical Letter, Inc. publications are protected by U.S. and international copyright laws. Forwarding, copying or any distribution of this material is prohibited.

Sharing a password with a non-subscriber or otherwise making the contents of this site available to third parties is strictly prohibited.

By accessing and reading the attached content I agree to comply with U.S. and international copyright laws and these terms and conditions of The Medical Letter, Inc.

For further information click: [Subscriptions](#), [Site Licenses](#), [Reprints](#)
or call customer service at: 800-211-2769

The Medical Letter[®]

on Drugs and Therapeutics

Volume 62 (Issue 1599)

June 1, 2020

Take CME Exams

IN BRIEF

Respiratory Depression with Gabapentinoids

The FDA has required new warnings in the labels of gabapentin (*Neurontin*, and others) and pregabalin (*Lyrica*, *Lyrica CR*, and generics) about the risk of life-threatening or fatal respiratory depression in patients with respiratory risk factors.¹ Respiratory risk factors include chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and concurrent use of opioids or other CNS depressants. Elderly patients are also at increased risk.

Gabapentin and pregabalin are FDA-approved to treat a variety of neurologic and neuropathic disorders and are frequently used off-label to treat non-neuropathic pain, anxiety, and insomnia, and hot flashes in women with breast cancer.²⁻⁵ Often prescribed with opioids and other CNS depressants, gabapentinoid misuse and abuse has been increasing. Gabapentin and pregabalin have a lower potential for abuse than opioids, but physical and psychological dependence can occur.

Gabapentinoids alone can cause respiratory depression. Coadministration with an opioid can increase the risk of opioid-related death.⁶ Possible mechanisms include reversal of opioid-induced tolerance and additive respiratory depression.⁷

Starting gabapentinoids at a low dose and titrating carefully is recommended to reduce the risk of respiratory depression in patients with respiratory risk factors and in the elderly. Reductions in the dosage of gabapentin and pregabalin are necessary in patients with renal impairment. ■

1. FDA. FDA warns about serious breathing problems with seizure and nerve pain medicines gabapentin (Neurontin, Gralise, Horizant) and pregabalin (Lyrica, Lyrica CR). Available at: <https://bit.ly/3e8w6nK>. Accessed May 21, 2020.
2. Nonopioid drugs for pain. *Med Lett Drugs Ther* 2018; 60:24.
3. Drugs for anxiety disorders. *Med Lett Drugs Ther* 2019; 61:121.
4. Drugs for chronic insomnia. *Med Lett Drugs Ther* 2018; 60:201.
5. Oxybutynin for hot flashes in women with breast cancer. *Med Lett Drugs Ther* 2019; 61:30.
6. T Gomes et al. Gabapentin, opioids, and the risk of opioid-related death: a population-based nested case-control study. *PLoS Med* 2017; 14:e1002396.
7. R Hill et al. Oxycodone-induced tolerance to respiratory depression: reversal by ethanol, pregabalin and protein kinase C inhibition. *Br J Pharmacol* 2018; 175:2492.

PRESIDENT: Mark Abramowicz, M.D.; **VICE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE EDITOR:** Gianna Zuccotti, M.D., M.P.H., F.A.C.P., Harvard Medical School
VICE PRESIDENT AND EDITOR IN CHIEF: Jean-Marie Pflomm, Pharm.D.; **ASSOCIATE EDITORS:** Susan M. Daron, Pharm.D., Amy Faucard, MLS, Corinne Z. Morrison, Pharm.D., Michael P. Viscusi, Pharm.D. **CONSULTING EDITORS:** Brinda M. Shah, Pharm.D., F. Peter Swanson, M.D.

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS: Carl W. Bazil, M.D., Ph.D., Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons; Ericka L. Crouse, Pharm.D., B.C.P.P., C.G.P., F.A.S.H.P., F.A.S.C.P., Virginia Commonwealth University; Vanessa K. Dalton, M.D., M.P.H., University of Michigan Medical School; Eric J. Epstein, M.D., Albert Einstein College of Medicine; David N. Juurlink, BPhM, M.D., Ph.D., Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre; Richard B. Kim, M.D., University of Western Ontario; Franco M. Muggia, M.D., New York University Medical Center; Sandip K. Mukherjee, M.D., F.A.C.C., Yale School of Medicine; Dan M. Roden, M.D., Vanderbilt University School of Medicine; Esperance A.K. Schaefer, M.D., M.P.H., Harvard Medical School; Neal H. Steigbigel, M.D., New York University School of Medicine; Arthur M. F. Yee, M.D., Ph.D., F.A.C.R., Weill Medical College of Cornell University

MANAGING EDITOR AND DIRECTOR OF CONTENT OPERATIONS: Susie Wong; **EDITORIAL ASSISTANT:** Karrie Ferrara

FULFILLMENT AND SYSTEMS MANAGER: Cristine Romatowski; **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF SALES:** Elaine Reaney-Tomaselli

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS: Joanne F. Valentino; **INTERIM PUBLISHER:** Jean-Marie Pflomm, Pharm.D.

Founded in 1959 by Arthur Kallet and Harold Aaron, M.D.

Copyright and Disclaimer: The Medical Letter, Inc. is an independent nonprofit organization that provides healthcare professionals with unbiased drug prescribing recommendations. The editorial process used for its publications relies on a review of published and unpublished literature, with an emphasis on controlled clinical trials, and on the opinions of its consultants. The Medical Letter, Inc. does not sell advertising or receive any commercial support. No part of the material may be reproduced or transmitted by any process in whole or in part without prior permission in writing. The editors do not warrant that all the material in this publication is accurate and complete in every respect. The editors shall not be held responsible for any damage resulting from any error, inaccuracy, or omission.

Subscription Services

Address:
 The Medical Letter, Inc.
 145 Huguenot St. Ste. 312
 New Rochelle, NY 10801-7537
 www.medicalletter.org

Customer Service:
 Call: 800-211-2769 or 914-235-0500
 Fax: 914-632-1733
 E-mail: custserv@medicalletter.org

Permissions:
 To reproduce any portion of this issue,
 please e-mail your request to:
 permissions@medicalletter.org

Subscriptions (US):
 1 year - \$159; 2 years - \$298;
 3 years - \$398. \$65 per year
 for students, interns, residents,
 and fellows in the US and Canada.
 Reprints - \$45 per issue or article

Site License Inquiries:
 E-mail: SubQuote@medicalletter.org
 Call: 800-211-2769
 Special rates available for bulk
 subscriptions.

Get Connected:  

Copyright 2020. ISSN 1523-2859

