

Providence Care | News Release

Antipsychotics linked to a higher death risk in elderly: Providence Care researcher

June 5, 2007

A new study led by a geriatric medicine specialist at St. Mary's of the Lake Hospital shows the use of antipsychotics appear linked with a higher risk of death in older Ontarians with dementia. The study was led by Dr. Sudeep Gill for the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES), a non-profit group that uses health information to produce knowledge on a range of issues.

"Both the United States Food and Drug Administration and Health Canada issued warnings in 2005 that the use of newer atypical antipsychotics to treat elderly patients with dementia was associated with a higher risk of death. Recent studies have provided support for these warnings and have raised further safety concerns about the older typical antipsychotics," said Dr. Gill.

"Previous trials have generally been very short and could not provide information about the long-term impact of antipsychotics on mortality. As well, relatively little information is available on the harms associated with older typical antipsychotics."

Investigators tracked all Ontario residents 66 years of age and older with dementia between April 1997 and March 2002 – some of whom were taking anti-psychotic drugs. They then looked to see if these people were alive or dead between 30 and 180 days after the initial prescription. Researchers found that adults with antipsychotic prescriptions had a slightly higher risk of death than those not taking prescriptions.

Dr. Gill stresses that "antipsychotics should not be taken if effective non-drug treatments are available or symptoms are unlikely to respond to antipsychotic treatment. Clinical trials involving behaviour management and caregiver education have shown benefits in both seniors living in the community and long-term care facilities, and may help to minimize antipsychotic use."

The study, "Antipsychotic drug use and mortality among older adults with dementia," is in the June 5, 2007 issue of the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. The study was supported by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

Providence Care's St. Mary's of the Lake Hospital is Southeastern Ontario's leader in specialized geriatrics, providing expert resources for professionals and caregivers. Clinical services include a 16-bed inpatient unit, day hospital and outpatient clinics. Consultation and outreach assessments are provided in people's homes, long-term care facilities and hospitals.

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Contact: Corinne Deshaw, Communications Officer, Providence Care 613-548-5567 ext. 5668

Providence Care is the leading provider of specialized care for some of the most vulnerable patients in Southeastern Ontario – the frail elderly, people coping with chronic illness, stroke survivors and those living with mental illness. One of Kingston's university hospitals, Providence has three main sites in Kingston: Mental Health Services, St. Mary's of the Lake Hospital and Providence Manor and 15 community locations. Affiliated with Queen's University, Providence Care is a major centre for teaching and research.