A qualitative study of gabapentin use and misuse: Perspectives of substance abuse treatment providers

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Gabapentin

- γ-aminobutyric acid (GABA)-analogue
- Treatment of epilepsy and neuralgia
- Prescribed off-label

- Low addictive liability level
- Prescription required
- Not scheduled under CSA
- Brands – Neurontin, Horizant, Gralise
Gabapentin misuse

Abuse and Diversion of Gabapentin Among Nonmedical Prescription Opioid Users in Appalachian Kentucky

Potentiation of the Effect of Buprenorphine/Naloxone With Gabapentin or Quetiapine

To the Editor: Although it is an effective treatment for opioid dependence, buprenorphine/naloxone may be misused. We report here a case of potentiation of buprenorphine/naloxone with gabapentin and quetiapine.

Gabapentinoid Abuse in Order to Potentiate the Effect of Methadone: A Survey among Substance Misusers

Colin R.W. Baird a, Pauline Fox b, Lesley A. Colvin a

Gabapentin misuse, abuse and diversion: a systematic review

Rachel Y. Smith, 1,2,3, Jennifer R. Havens, 1,2 & Sharon L. Walsh, 1,4,5

Prescription Medication Misuse Among Opioid Dependent Patients Seeking Inpatient Detoxification

Timothy Willens, MD, 1,2 Courtney Zulauf, BA, 1 Denice Ryland, RN, 2 Nicholas Carrellas, BA, 1 Isela Catalina-Wellington, RN, BSN 2

An ethnographic decision model of the initiation of gabapentin misuse among prescription and/or illicit opioid (mis)users

Mance E. Buttram, 3, Steven P. Kurtz, 3, Theodore J. Cicero, 3, Jennifer R. Havens 3
Gabapentin use during treatment

A Proof-of-Concept Randomized Controlled Study of Gabapentin: Effects on Cannabis Use, Withdrawal and Executive Function Deficits in Cannabis-Dependent Adults

Barbara J Mason, Rebecca Crenel, Vivian Goodall, John M Light, Susan Quello, Faryad Shadad, Kimberly Buffkin, Mark Kyle, Murali Adusumilli, Adnan Beganovic and Sanjosh Rao

Importance of Gabapentin Dose in Treatment of Opioid Withdrawal

Mehrdad Salehi, MD, Gholam Reza Kheirolabadi, MD, Mohammad Reza Mansy, PhD and Mansour Razekesh, MD

Gabapentin Treatment for Alcohol Dependence
A Randomized Clinical Trial

Barbara J. Mason, PhD, Susan Quello, BA, BE, Vivian Goodall, MPH, Faryad Shadad, MD, Mark Kyle, MD, Adrian Beganovic, MD

Gabapentin for the treatment of alcohol use disorder

Barbara J. Mason [Pearson Family Professor]

Randomized, Placebo-Controlled Pilot Trial of Gabapentin During an Outpatient, Buprenorphine-Assisted Detoxification Procedure

Nicholas C. Sanders, PhD, Michael J. Mancho, MD, W. Brooks Gantry, MD, J. Benjamin Gable, MD, Warren K. Bickel, PhD, Jeff Thostenson, and Alison H. Olivero, PhD
Aims

• Examine substance abuse treatment providers’ experiences with gabapentin prescribed to clients during treatment and detox.

• How is gabapentin used in these settings?

• What are the benefits and risks for clients?
Methods

• Qualitative interviews with key informants
  • Currently working with opioid-dependent clients in a treatment or detox center
  • Specialized knowledge of treatment practices and client experiences

• Interviews conducted:
  • Between August 2018 and January 2019
  • South Florida

• Thematic analysis using descriptive and in vivo coding schemes
## Characteristics of key informants

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<th>Title</th>
<th>Education</th>
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<td>Chief Exec. Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Therapist</td>
<td>MS, Counseling</td>
<td>15</td>
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Therapeutic use

- Treat a physical and mental health symptoms which may interfere with treatment.
  - Cope with withdrawal
  - Stabilize mood

- “[Clients] might need something because [they’re] coming off serious drugs, feeling sick, and getting their faculties back.”

- “Gabapentin will indubitably help someone that’s experiencing anxiety and the vast majority of people that are recently sober are experiencing anxiety.”
Misuse among treatment clients

• Gabapentin does not have the same risks as opioids and is used as an alternative to other controlled medications.

• May occur following treatment because clients:
  • “believe they need something to cope with their symptoms.”
  • make an impulse decision due to boredom or social influences

• Gabapentin misuse is a potential first marker of relapse.
  • “Gabapentin misuse will precede a recurrence of heroin or crack or other drugs they would prefer to use.”
  • “They go from abusing gabapentin and Suboxone and Subutex... they go from that right back to their drug of choice... heroin, crack.”
Gabapentin use during treatment

• Policies regarding gabapentin administration vary.

• Clients may be allowed to take it for physical or mental health problems.
  • “There’s really no hesitancy to prescribe [gabapentin].”
  • “When clients are discharged, they’re given [gabapentin] as part of their discharge medication so they continue using it.”

• Four KIs said clients will be asked to taper gabapentin during treatment.
  • “Everyone’s becoming aware of [misuse] now. We always gotta stay ahead of the curve. If we see [gabapentin misuse] starting to develop, we gotta nip it.”
Lingering questions

• KIs had conflicting perceptions about gabapentin:
  • It is generally beneficial for clients
  • It may be misused by some clients

• “It would help people in the centers to know why gabapentin is being prescribed and all the multi-uses of it.”

• As to whether gabapentin should be prescribed to clients, “There’s no clear-cut answer. I’d love to hear somebody say there is. And it’s like, ‘Tell me!’”
Discussion

• According to KIs, gabapentin has several benefits for treatment clients:
  • Moderated withdrawal symptoms
  • Treatment of physical pain and mental distress

• Considering the setting and population, gabapentin misuse is not surprising.

• Possible first indication of relapse.

• KIs noted that more research is needed:
  • Clinical trials
  • “Real world” experiences in treatment and post-treatment settings
Limitations

• Experiences may not be representative of treatment providers in other settings or locations

• Small convenience sample from South Florida

• Potential for recall bias or interviewer effects.
Next steps

• Additional epidemiologic research among treatment clients

• How to best use gabapentin in treatment settings

• Effect of prescribed gabapentin on client recovery
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