

More Bad News About Antidepressants

The Good News Is That There Is A Safer Alternative

This week's Panorama exposed yet more controversy over the antidepressant drug Seroxat. The BBC programme tracked down material at manufacturer GlaxoSmithKline's offices which revealed company bosses were concerned about the drug before it was released, including a memo written by staff which reads: "It seems incongruous that we state that [Seroxat] is safe yet report so many Serious Adverse Events". The most chilling of these adverse 'events' is an increased risk of suicide, especially among adolescents. But according to Panorama, it appears sales staff were still instructed to market the drug as safe and effective.

Sadly, this is not news to me - nor to award-winning investigative medical journalist and my co-author Jerome Burne. We wrote *Food is Better Medicine Than Drugs* to expose precisely this kind of dangerous and underhand dealing - and to offer a safer, and often more effective, solution to many common health problems via nutrition.

Adverse reactions to prescribed drugs kill 10,000 and hospitalise 40,000 people a year in the UK - and this includes anti-depressants. Seroxat belongs to a class of anti-depressants called SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) - they were introduced in the early 1990s to replace an older class of antidepressants when the patents ran out. Yet despite being marketed as a wonder cure for depression, there was already hidden evidence for dangerous side effects and lack of efficacy, and more has been emerging ever since.

For example:

- The first study to show a link between an SSRI and suicide was published in 1990.*
- When Sweden's drug regulatory body insisted in seeing all the data on SSRI effectiveness in the mid-1990s, they found the companies had been highly selective in publishing the studies, and had not made all of them public.*
- Between 1995 and 2002, a psychiatrist worried about the link between SSRIs and suicide sent hundreds of pages of evidence about it to the UK Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency. The MHRA continued to insist there was no problem.*
- In 2000, a big study based on all the best evidence submitted to the US Food and Drug Administration over ten years for SSRI licence applications concluded that these drugs were no better than the older anti-depressants they had replaced.*

However, both the manufacturers and the regulators were still claiming that side effects were minimal and that there was no cause for alarm. Doctors were therefore writing an ever-larger number of prescriptions for these drugs. In the UK, more adolescents were getting them than anywhere else in Europe, even though the drugs had no licence for treating adolescents. In 2004, 3.5 million people received 20 million prescriptions for SSRIs, and global sales of SSRIs are now estimated at about \$17 billion.

Today, at least some of these facts have become more widely known. Doctors are now advised not to prescribe SSRI antidepressants for children because they double the risk of suicide (apart from Prozac, which is the one SSRI licensed for use in children). Psychological counselling is recommended instead. According to a major study, SSRIs are no better than a placebo, and the manufacturers of Seroxat have admitted that at least a quarter of patients may have withdrawal problems.

If you're finding this makes for depressing reading, I invite you to read *Food Is Better Medicine Than Drugs* to find out more about how you can use food and nutrients to address many health issues - including depression - without the risk of side effects, withdrawal or even death.

"Food is Better Medicine than Drugs" should be on the core recommended reading list for all medical students.' Jonathan Waxman, Professor of Oncology at the Hammersmith Hospital, London.

"Food is Better Medicine than Drugs" is packed with useful and original information for patients with various long term diseases or those who are simply seeking to live a healthier life. It is extremely practical, a crusade against ignorance, and enables patients to remove their straightjackets and take a new approach to improving health." Dr Michael Dixon, Chairman of the NHS Alliance. Wishing you the best of health,