The role of cultural interaction in Tianeptine Abuse and Different Tianeptine Application Methods

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Tianeptine is a selective serotonin reuptake enhancer, possessing strong antidepressant and anxiolytic properties. Its relative lack of sedative, anticholinergic and cardiovascular side effects makes it a highly tolerable substance of abuse. However, physical dependence quickly develops and withdrawal symptoms are common. Abusers in Georgia and Armenia use tianeptine by intravenous injection. Drug abusing behaviour usually starts during puberty, since it stems from psychological, social and cultural circumstances. Sociodemographic studies show that drug abusing behaviour in Turkey varies according to region and substance. This paper investigates differences between Georgian foreigners and the local population in the eastern Black Sea region in terms of tianeptine abuse and discusses complications resulting from intravenous injection of tiapentine.

Key Words: Tianeptine, drug abuse, intravenous injection, complication

Introduction

Substance abuse is gradually becoming more common despite various preventive measures particularly in the developing countries, and is an important issue for public health in Turkey as is all over the world. Substance abuse generally begins in the adolescent period and psychological, social and cultural effects play an important role (1). Previous studies reveal that substance abuse in Turkey shows increasing variation according to geographical regions and the type of substance (2, 3).

Tianeptine is an antidepressant agent having similar effects with serotonin reuptake enhancers. In addition to its cognitive effect that enhances attention and learning, it has also anxiolytic effect similar to that of tricyclic and tetracyclic antidepressants. It has been reported that some cases develop tolerance to tianeptine, and the drug is frequently consumed at higher doses because of high tolerability and as the patient feels himself/herself strong and thus causes physical signs of abstinence in case it is not available (4).

In this paper, substance addiction of the workers that came to Turkey from Georgia, the different ways of tianeptine use they taught to young Turkish citizens they became friends with, and also the risks, are discussed along with three cases.

Case Reports

Case 1

A 30-year-old male, foreign field worker was found in an unconscious state in his room after lunch and was brought to the emergency room. The patient was unconscious with no eye opening and verbal response, but minimal response to painful stimuli, and his pupils were isochoric and miotic. His arterial blood pressure was 100/60 mmHg and heart rate was 54 beats min⁻¹. Spontaneous respiration was insufficient and irregular. Anamnesis obtained from his friends revealed no history of trauma or chronic disease. It was learned that he has been using tianeptine (Stablon®) for the last few years for his psychiatric problems, and that an injector and the drug box was found near him at the time of event. There was an injection mark on his arm, but the dose of the drug was indefinite. The patient was intubated and was transferred to the intensive care unit for further analysis and treatment. Naloxone was administered, and the patient was extubated after mechanical ventilation support for 2 hours, and he was discharged the day after. The friends of the patient avoided giving detailed information, as they were reluctant to involve in a judicial event. They only told that the patient has been using tianeptine, sometimes via the intravenous route.

Case 2

A 32-year-old male patient, who had been receiving tianeptine for the last 2 years after using heroin for 4 years and also consuming alcohol occasionally, told that he has been using tianeptine as was described by his foreign co-workers. He has been receiving 4 boxes (240
Some studies stated that high dose of tianeptine is well-tolerated, insignificant and temporary adverse effects such as itching, constipation, poor appetite, weight loss, impaired sleep, abdominal pain, difficulty in urinating, and behavioural disorders may be seen initially, but the abuser insists on using the drug due to its pleasure-inducing effect (10). The stimulating and pleasure-inducing effect of tianeptine and its tolerability even at high doses lead the abuser to continuously increase the dose and be dissatisfied with oral ingestion. Dependents that have no difficulty to obtain tianeptine do not consider the adverse effects and the need for gradually increasing doses as a problem.

Tianeptine abuse is an issue that should be carefully handled in subjects with a history of alcohol and substance abuse. Using tianeptine in the treatment of another substance addiction may pose the risk of tianeptine addiction (4).

Most of the previous studies revealed that peer effects are important environmental risk factors for the development and maintenance of substance abuse (11-14). As was expressed in the present study, friendship between people from different cultures brings along different ways of substance abuse and widens the range of potential complications. Ease of access to the drugs leads the wannabe and those who want to experience the substance result in substance addiction.

Conclusion

Antidepressants can be easily obtained from any health institute with prescription, or even can be purchased from the pharmacies without prescription. It should be taken into account that high doses of these drugs, which are obtained in an uncontrolled manner, may cause severe adverse effects, thus uncontrolled sale of these drugs should be prevented. As is understood from the present cases, the drugs, which can be abused, should be determined and these drugs should not be sold without prescription.

Substance abuse, which is encountered frequently, intoxications and related deaths stand out as a medical and judicial problem. With this paper, we aimed to share our experience on tianeptine abuse and to increase the awareness of the society on this issue.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest was declared by the authors.

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Author Contributions


References