

Antidepressants Pregnancy Risk: Babies Adversely Affected

Alliance for Human Research Protection, Sat, 5 Feb 2005

Thanks to the BBC 3-part Panorama series (beginning October 2002), it is no longer a secret that coming off SSRI antidepressants can cause serious symptoms of withdrawal in some users. Christopher Pittman is on trial for killing his grandparents while taking Zoloft when he was 12 years old.

Tonight at 10:00 p.m. AHRP board member, Dr. Joseph Glenmullen, will debate Dr. William Callahan on CNN about the potential risk for an SSRI such as Zoloft to trigger violent behavior.

The latest SSRI withdrawal study (published in The Lancet) by a team at the University of La Laguna in Spain suggests that unborn babies could also be at risk from their mothers' use of SSRIs. Symptoms of neonatal withdrawal syndrome resemble withdrawal symptoms of infants born to Crack Cocaine addicted mothers - they include, convulsions, irritability, abnormal crying and tremor.

The hazardous effects of antidepressants have not been generally known or acknowledged - much less, the adverse effects on newborn babies. The FDA had failed to require warnings about the activation, suicidal risks for children, and the risks of withdrawal syndrome for newborn infants. However, several published reports do exist. [See: <http://www.ahrp.org/infomail/04/06/29.php>]

In 1996, Chambers et al (1996) reported that 31.5% of 73 infants exposed to Prozac in the third trimester exhibited symptoms of "poor neonatal adaptation" including respiratory difficulties, irritability, jitteriness, cyanosis (turning blue) on feeding. [Birth outcomes in pregnant women taking fluoxetine. N Engl Med 335:10101015]

In April 2004, the NTP-CERHR panel issued a report about published evidence of infants exposed to an antidepressant in utero and / or breast fed by mothers who took an antidepressant: The REPRODUCTIVE and DEVELOPMENTAL TOXICITY of FLUOXETINE http://cerhr.niehs.nih.gov/news/fluoxetine/fluoxetine_final.pdf. Following the publication of the NTP-CERHR report, the FDA convened an advisory committee, June 9 that recommended class labeling for the neonatal toxicity/withdrawal syndrome related to in utero exposure of SSRI/SNRI's. The committee also strongly supported a package insert for patients (pregnant or considering pregnancy) which provided detailed information at the 6th to 8th grade level as to what is known about the risk/benefit issues for the fetus/newborn and for the mother when choices have to be made about the use of these agents in pregnancy.. See synopsis of the advisory committee recommendations at: <http://www.ahrp.org/infomail/04/06/29.php>

In the new study the researchers used World Health Organization records. They found more than 100 such cases. Based on the treating doctors' original reports, the researchers narrowed those down to 93 that could be linked strongly to an antidepressant medication. After conducting a statistical analysis, the authors concluded that the withdrawal reports

were more common than would be expected by chance, and should be published to alert doctors and patients.

"In 13 of the 93 cases, the study found, newborns suffered convulsions, a reaction that has not been widely noted in adults who discontinue antidepressant use."