Inhibition of lactation: risks associated with dopamine agonists

A survey conducted in Lyon, France, shows that many women are prescribed drugs, especially bromocriptine, to inhibit lactation. The authors highlight the high risk of severe and sometimes life-threatening adverse effects, especially cardiovascular and neurological disorders. 

In France, bromocriptine and lisuride, two rye ergot derivative dopamine agonists, are approved for inhibition of lactation. They carry a risk of arterial hypertension, stroke, hallucinations and seizures (1).

With support from the Rhône-Alps regional health insurance services, URCAH, the Lyon Regional Pharmacovigilance Centre (CRPV) conducted a survey of methods currently used to inhibit lactation in France (2). A questionnaire was sent to 618 maternity units in university, public and private hospitals. The authors analysed prescriptions reimbursed by the Rhône-Alps health insurance services for women aged 14 to 50 years (3).

Bromocriptine and dihydroergocryptine are generally sufficient to relieve pain and breast inflammation (10%)

In practice. The absence of breast-feeding, without any other measures, is rarely associated with serious complications.

Paracetamol and non-drug measures are generally sufficient to relieve pain (experienced by 40% of women) and breast inflammation (10%).

Dopamine agonists derived from rye ergot have little place in the inhibition of lactation, especially when the frequency and potential severity of their adverse effects in this setting are taken into account (4).

The 31st French Pharmacovigilance Meeting took place in March 2010 in Bordeaux. Each year this conference examines adverse events reported to regional pharmacovigilance centres by healthcare professionals, as well as the French pharmacovigilance database.

The following articles will examine presentations having important practical implications, which provide useful feedback and encourage further reporting. These presentations highlight the importance of reporting adverse effects, and their analysis by pharmacovigilance centres independent of the pharmaceutical industry, in providing transparent, high-quality information that serves patients’ best interests(6,5),(993,993)