



Australian Prescriber



AN INDEPENDENT REVIEW

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CUTTING EDGE INFORMATION ABOUT MEDICINE

One of Australia's major sources of information about medicines, Australian Prescriber, was mailed out to 58,000 health professionals today.

The journal, which is published six times a year, is a national independent review of therapeutic topics, primarily aimed at health professionals. It aims to provide short reviews on a range of topics which will assist readers in their professional duties. Its main strength is that it can comment independently as it contains no advertising.

Of interest to the general public are three articles about antidepressants - new developments in antidepressants, the next generation of antidepressants and the healing power of St John's Wort.

ST JOHN'S WORT - THE NATURAL ANTIDEPRESSANT?

St John's Wort has generated considerable professional and lay interest as an antidepressant. Some trials report that the effect is comparable to that of pharmaceutical antidepressants. The remedy has been used in Germany for many years, however there is uncertainty about how it works. Philip Mitchell, Professor at the University of New South Wales, states that there have been weaknesses in the research conducted on St John's Wort.

Professor Mitchell said "A large multicentre study is in progress in the USA and this should clarify if St John's Wort is an effective antidepressant." "Until we know more about the active ingredient of St John's Wort, people taking antidepressants should probably not take the plant extract as well, to avoid possible interactions."

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN ANTIDEPRESSANTS

Several new antidepressants have been introduced into Australia. These medicines differ from earlier generation antidepressants, both in their structure and the way they work, according to Trevor Norman, Associate Professor at the University of Melbourne.

While the introduction of these new drugs has not revolutionised the treatment of major depression, they do have fewer side effects than earlier generation antidepressants.

THE NEXT GENERATION OF ANTIDEPRESSANTS

The new generation antidepressants have safety advantages, according to John Tiller, Associate Professor at the University of Melbourne.

They are also more effective than previous treatments. This may be because they are more likely to be taken in an adequate dose for long enough to relieve the depression or prevent a relapse.

In addition to treating depression, some of these medicines may have further roles in anxiety disorders, including obsessive compulsive disorder. They may also have a role in helping schizophrenic patients who suffer from depression.

These new antidepressants herald an era of better tolerated medicines that are safer, and less toxic in overdose.

For information about other topics, including the top 10 drugs used in Australia, go to the Internet version of Australian Prescriber on <http://www.australianprescriber.com>

For a copy of the complete articles or information about Australian Prescriber, contact (02) 6289 7038, or fax (02) 6289 8641, or visit the website at <http://www.australianprescriber.com>

For further information:

For further information about antidepressants Professor Mitchell is available on 8,11 and 13 October all day and 12 October after 4.30pm, on phone (02) 9382 3711. Professor Norman is available on 8 and 11-15 October on phone (03) 9496 5680. Professor Tiller is available on phone (03) 9344 6090.