



A Call for Action During the COVID-19 Pandemic:

Clinicians' role in diabetes screening for patients on antipsychotic medications

As a clinician, your help is needed to encourage patients on antipsychotic medications to get tested for diabetes, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Patients on antipsychotics should receive an HbA1c and LDL-C test when they are initially prescribed an antipsychotic, and annually thereafter. However, *now* is a critical time to ensure that testing is completed. If tests indicate that your patient has diabetes, your patient must take special precautions to protect themselves against COVID-19 and need to understand the urgency of getting care for COVID-19 upon initial onset of symptoms.

The link between antipsychotics and diabetes

Major psychiatric disorders, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depressive disorder, are associated with increased morbidity and mortality from a range of medical causes, including diabetes mellitus, according to the American Diabetes Association (ADA). The second-generation antipsychotics (SGAs),¹ that are frequently used to treat these disorders, have been linked to obesity and type 2 diabetes².

The link between diabetes and COVID-19

According to Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF), individuals with diabetes and COVID-19 are among the most vulnerable for serious COVID-19 complications.³ While much is still unknown about COVID-19, studies indicate that patients with COVID-19 and *any* form of diabetes are at an increased risk for complications and mortality than COVID-19 patients without diabetes.^{4,5,6}

What You Can Do

You can help by screening your patients who are on antipsychotics for diabetes because patients with diabetes need to take extra precautions to avoid getting COVID-19 and must monitor potential symptoms more closely than those who do not have diabetes or other chronic illnesses.

Even if you were not the prescriber of the antipsychotic medication, you may be in the unique position to assist your patient during these trying times. Do not assume that another clinician is monitoring your patient for diabetes.

If you have the ability to order labs, submit an order for HbA1c and LDL-C tests. If not, talk to your patient about the need to get these tests done and, upon patient agreement, you can coordinate with their primary care provider to ensure that the tests are ordered.

References

¹Second Generation Antipsychotics include: Clozapine, Olanzapine, Ziprasidone, Risperidone, Olanzapine-fluoxetine (combination)

²Muench, J., & Hamer, A. M. Adverse Effects of Antipsychotic Medications. Am Fam Physician. 2010 Mar 1;81(5):617-622

³JDRF.org (2020). Coronavirus + Diabetes. Retrieved from: <https://coronavirusdiabetes.org/>

⁴Barron E, et al. (2020). Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes and COVID-19 related mortality in England: a whole population study. NHS England. Retrieved from <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/valabhji-COVID-19-and-Diabetes-Paper-1.pdf>

⁵Holman N, et al. (2020). Type 1 and type 2 diabetes and COVID-19 related mortality in England: a cohort study in people with diabetes. NHS England. Retrieved from: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Valabhji-COVID-19-and-Diabetes-Paper-2-Full-Manuscript.pdf>

⁶Y. Jie Chee, S. Jia Huey Ng, E. Yeoh (2020). Diabetic ketoacidosis precipitated by COVID-19 in a patient with newly diagnosed diabetes mellitus, Diabetes Research and Clinical Practice. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.diabres.2020.108166>