Co-prescribing of Opioids and Psychotropic Medications Among Medicare-enrolled Older Adults on Long-term Opioid Therapy

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Background

• Co-prescribing of opioids with psychotropic (COOP) medications is a growing concern.
• Several agencies have recommended caution against COOP due to the potential risk of adverse outcomes.
• The problem is particularly pronounced in older adults, however evidence of the extent of the problem is lacking.

Objective

• Assess trends in COOP and characterize COOP patterns among Medicare-enrolled older adults with chronic non-cancer pain (CNCP) on long-term opioid therapy (LTOT).

Methods

Data source: 2012-2018 5% Medicare administrative claims data
• Inclusion criteria: ≥ 65 years, continuously enrolled with LTOT use (≥ 3 prescriptions for opioids with ≥ 45 cumulative days’ supply during any 90-day period), ≥2 claims with diagnoses for CNCP conditions within a 30-day period, and no claims with diagnosis of cancer or hospice use in the 12 months prior to the LTOT initiation.
• COOP was defined as an overlap between opioids and any class of psychotropic medication based on their prescription fill dates and days of supply following index date in a given year.
• The rate of COOP, and the co-prescribing intensity (co-prescribing days/total opioid prescription days) for each class of psychotropic medications was calculated for each calendar year.

Results

High rates of co-prescribing of psychotropic medications were identified among older adults on long-term opioid therapy

- Among psychotropic medications, antidepressants had the highest rates of co-prescribing (46.09%), followed by benzodiazepines (32.32%), and skeletal muscle relaxants (15.48%) in 2018.
- Antidepressants also had the highest co-prescribing intensity (50.33%), followed by benzodiazepines (19.95%), and nonbenzodiazepine hypnotics (9.96%) in 2018.

Conclusions

• High rates of COOP among older adults with CNCP who initiated LTOT were observed.
• Future research should investigate the driving factors of COOP and safety associated with various patterns of use.

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Key references