

New generation antidepressants increase risk of gastrointestinal bleeding

Research published in the *British Medical Journal* warns that a new generation of antidepressant drugs, known as SSRIs, increases the risk of gastrointestinal bleeding.

Canadian researchers monitored hospital admissions for gastrointestinal bleeding among almost 314,000 people, age 65 and above, who had been prescribed antidepressants between 1992 and 1998.

There were 974 gastrointestinal bleeds during the study, with the more powerful drugs (based on the level of "serotonin re-uptake") causing a higher level of risk. This was especially true of older patients in whom the risk increased by more than 10% for each more powerful grade of inhibitor drug, and those who had already had a bleed, in whom the risk increased by almost 10%.

For patients in their 80s, bleeding rates increased from 10.6 per 1,000 person years for drugs with the lowest inhibition to 14.7 with the highest. This equals an additional bleed for every 244 patients treated with the highest inhibiting drugs for a year. The data also showed that the numbers of 80 year-olds prescribed SSRIs rose from 892 in 1992 to 11,179 in 1997.

Among patients who had had peptic ulcers, bleeding rates increased from over 28 to more than 40 per 1,000 person years. This equates to an additional bleed for every 85 patients treated with the highest inhibiting drugs for a year.

SOURCE: *British Medical Journal*, September 22, 2001.