



Center for Behavioral Health Studies

Medication May Improve Cocaine Treatment Results

Medications May improve Withdrawals

A medication used to treat high blood pressure may be an effective add-on therapy for cocaine dependent patients. During the detoxification process some patients are prone to suffering from acute withdrawal symptoms after stopping their drug use.

Cocaine dependent patients experiencing severe withdrawal symptoms are often heavy users of cocaine. Patients who experienced severe withdrawal, anxiety and other symptoms who **were treated with the medication—propranolol, stayed in treatment longer.**

Research shows these individuals with severe symptoms are much more dependent on the drug than patients who have less acute withdrawal symptoms. Many times these acute patients are unable to stop using the drug for significant periods without problems of craving. As a result, they are more likely to drop out of treatment programming.

Researchers have found that many cocaine abusers entering residential treatment programs often have withdrawal severity testing scores high enough to put them at risk for doing poorly in treatment.

Use of Beta Blockers

Propranolol belongs to a class of medications called beta-adrenergic blockers that inhibit the effects of adrenaline in the central and peripheral nervous systems. Here it works to arouse the body's "fight or flight" response to dangerous or stressful situations.

One of the current theories is that propranolol might lessen the severity of symptoms of anxiety and craving frequently experienced by cocaine patients.

Beta-adrenergic blockers have been used clinically for years to treat general anxiety and anxiety associated with alcohol withdrawal. The researchers thought propranolol's tempering of symptoms such as palpitations and sweating might also reduce cocaine craving symptoms as well.

Early Results Promising

NIDA's studies are showing that nearly 69 percent of cocaine treatment patients experiencing severe withdrawal symptoms who received propranolol completed treatment.

This compared to 29 percent of patients completing treatment with similar symptoms who were given a placebo.



All subjects received cognitive-behavioral counseling twice a week. Urine tests for cocaine were conducted three times a week throughout the trial to objectively assess cocaine use. Treatment retention, cocaine withdrawal symptoms, craving,

mood, and anxiety symptoms were evaluated weekly.

Withdrawal Symptoms Reduced

When the researchers analyzed results for all study subjects, they found that propranolol-treated subjects had less severe cocaine withdrawal symptoms during the trial period.

Summary

While this study's findings are preliminary, they suggest that propranolol may be a useful add-on treatment for cocaine dependent patients experiencing severe withdrawal symptoms. Although treatment outcomes in propranolol treated subjects were encouraging, they are still far from optimal.

This study found propranolol treated individuals were much more likely to complete the treatment program than those who were not treated.

Medications combined with intensive counseling is an effective regimen in treating patients suffering from severe withdrawal

Editorial Staff

Editor in Chief:
David W. Cunningham

Assistant Editors:
Hugh Kilbourne
Kay Seder

Art/Graphics Designer:
Lenny Joyce



**Center for Behavioral
Health Studies**

**Rimrock Foundation
P.O. Box 30374
Billings, MT 59107**

NON-PROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BILLINGS, MT
PERMIT #142

For further information on Rimrock Foundation's treatment of Cocaine, call Jen Porter, Admissions Supervisor at 1-800-227-3953 or 1-406-248-3175, or visit our web site at www.rimrock.org. For more educational information on Cocaine, contact the Rimrock Foundation Library at the above numbers.