No place for antipsychotics in the treatment of delirium in hospitalised patients?

Hein J.E.M. Janssens

For decades now, antipsychotics have been used to treat delirium, including the only agent authorised for this indication in the Netherlands, haloperidol. Once more, however, research has found no, or hardly any, scientific evidence for this treatment. This is particularly true for patients who develop delirium in hospital. A recent randomised study has shown, among other things, that haloperidol has no effect on the duration of delirium in patients admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU). The authors of a thorough systematic review also found no clear evidence for the value of antipsychotics in treating delirious patients admitted to other hospital departments than the ICU. The many guidelines that recommend haloperidol or other antipsychotics for the treatment of delirium should stop doing so as long as there is no proof of for their effectiveness from well-designed scientific research. Adjustment of current guidelines on the basis of the most recent scientific publications would then be a logical consequence.

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Literature references

Authors

- Hein J.E.M. Janssens

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