

The North Yorkshire and York Area Prescribing Committee (APC), supporting both North Yorkshire CCG and Vale of York CCG, does not support the prescribing of dosulepin for any indication.

Dosulepin should not be prescribed for any indication because the evidence supporting its tolerability relative to other antidepressants is outweighed by the increased cardiac risk and toxicity in overdose.

Background

Dosulepin, formerly known as dothiepin, is a tricyclic antidepressant licensed for the treatment of depressive illness in adults. It should not be used as an anxiolytic, for neuropathic pain or for its sedative effects as an aid to sleep. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) states that dosulepin should not be prescribed.

The North Yorkshire and York APC does not support the prescribing of dosulepin due to the significant safety concerns and this position is supported by NHS England. Dosulepin has been made non-formulary by the North Yorkshire and York APC.

NICE CG90: Depression in Adults has a “do not do” recommendation: “Do not switch to, or start, dosulepin because the evidence supporting its tolerability relative to other antidepressants is outweighed by the increased cardiac risk and toxicity in overdose”. Dosulepin overdose is associated with a high mortality rate, even with hospital treatment, with cases of just ten x 75 mg tablets (750 mg) having fatal consequences. Nevertheless, dosulepin continues to be prescribed widely.

In December 2007 the MHRA advised that, as dosulepin has a narrow safety margin, it should be avoided. It is marked in the BNF as “less suitable for prescribing” because the relative incidence and severity of side effects is higher than other antidepressants, together with a greater risk of toxicity and potential drug interactions.

Prescribing of antidepressants should be in line with the relevant NICE guidance. Where pharmacological treatment is needed for depression, a generic SSRI is usually the first-line option. Dosulepin is contraindicated in acute porphyrias, cardiac arrhythmias, heart block, the immediate recovery period after myocardial infarction, during the manic phase of bipolar disorder and in severe liver disease.

Recommendations to clinicians

- Do not initiate dosulepin in any new patients.
- Dosulepin poses a significant risk to patients and prescribers should actively review all patients being prescribed this medicine and renew efforts to switch to an alternative and safer antidepressant.
- Patients at risk of suicide should be reviewed as a matter of urgency.
- At this review, consideration should be given to reducing the dose, with a view to changing to an alternative, or stopping treatment.

- Dosulepin should not be stopped suddenly unless serious side effects have occurred, as patients may experience unpleasant discontinuation symptoms. Slowly tapering the dose over three to four weeks can help prevent this.
- Discontinuation symptoms may include anxiety, flu-like symptoms and insomnia. Some people may require a more gradual tapering of the dose if withdrawal symptoms occur. The doses selected and the speed at which they are reduced will need to be individualised for each patient

Dosulepin de-prescribing guidance.

Please visit the recently updated TEWV dosulepin de-prescribing guidance, where information to support stopping dosulepin, switching to another antidepressant and patient information leaflets can be found:

<https://www.tewv.nhs.uk/about/publications/dosulepin-guidance/>

References

Psychotropic Drug Directory 2020/21. Bazire S. Lloyd-Reinhold Publications, Norwich.

NHS England. Items which should not routinely be prescribed in primary care: Guidance for CCGs, June 2019: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/items-which-should-not-routinely-be-prescribed-in-primary-care-v2.1.pdf>

NICE Clinical Guideline 90: Depression in adults: recognition and management:
<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg90/chapter/Recommendations>

PrescQIPP DROP-List (Drugs to Review for Optimised Prescribing), Bulletin 126, April 2016:
<https://www.prescqipp.info/umbraco/surface/authorisedmediasurface/index?url=%2fmedia%2f1288%2fb126-dosulepin-drop-list-21.pdf>

NICE Medicines Optimisation: Key therapeutic topics (February 2016)

Dosulepin: measures to reduce risk of fatal overdose (MHRA Drug Safety Update: vol.1, issue 5. December 2007)

Summary of product characteristics for Dosulepin 75mg capsules (MHRA)

TEWV NHS Foundation Trust: Dosulepin guidance:
<https://www.tewv.nhs.uk/content/uploads/2021/12/Dosulepin-guidance.pdf>

Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines in Psychiatry, Taylor D et al. 13th Edition.