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# Behavioral and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia (BPSD): Medication Treatment

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Dementia patients often exhibit symptoms like agitation, aggression, wandering, psychosis, depression, and anxiety – collectively referred to as BPSD. While therapeutic approaches like art and music therapy can be highly effective, you'll sometimes need to prescribe medications to ensure safety. Here we'll delve into your pharmaceutical options. Start low, increase doses as needed / tolerated, and monitor closely for side effects.

## **Cholinesterase inhibitors:**

These not only slow cognitive decline but also address behavioral issues. They're particularly beneficial for dementia resulting from Parkinson's or Lewy Body disease.

- Donepezil: 5-20 mg daily.
- Galantamine:
  - Sustained-release: 8-24 mg daily.
  - Immediate-release: 4 -8 mg daily.
- Rivastigmine patch: Start with 4.6 mg/24 hours, can increase to 9.5 mg.

## **Antidepressants:**

Suitable for mild to moderate agitation, restlessness, and anxiety.

- SSRIs
  - Escitalopram: 5 – 20 mg daily.
  - Sertraline: 12.5 -75 mg daily.
- Mirtazapine: 7.5 – 15 mg at bedtime; also helps with insomnia.

## **Benzodiazepines:**

Use judiciously, given potential side effects like cognitive impairments and balance disturbances.

- Lorazepam: 0.25-0.5 mg as needed every 4-6 hours.
- Clonazepam 0.25-0.5 mg once daily or at bedtime; also helps with REM sleep anomalies.

## **Antipsychotics:**

While there's an FDA warning about increased mortality and stroke risk in the elderly, the absolute risk remains modest. These medications can be indispensable for patients exhibiting psychosis or aggression.

- Risperidone: 0.125 to 2 mg at bedtime.
- Quetiapine 25-50 mg at bedtime; better option for Parkinson's patients and patients with insomnia.

## **Mood stabilizers and anticonvulsants:**

- Depakote: 250 mg two to three times daily; good for impulsivity. Monitor for hyperammonemia.
- Lithium: 600-900 mg at bedtime; aim for blood levels of 0.4-0.8 mEq/L.
- Gabapentin: 100-300 mg three to four times daily. Good for agitation.

## **Other agents:**

- Acetaminophen: Surprisingly helpful, probably because it eases pain, which is often the underlying cause of the agitation. Dose: 500 mg BID or TID.
- Opiates: Effective for pain-related agitation. Use Roxanol liquid, start with 2.5 mg daily.
- Trazodone: For agitation and insomnia; 12.5-50 mg at midday or bedtime.
- Prazosin: Begin with 1 mg at bedtime and monitor for blood pressure changes.
- Clonidine patch: Begin at 0.1 mg daily; good for anxiety and agitation and ensures compliance.
- Dronabinol: 2.5 – 5 mg once or twice daily helps with agitation; also promotes appetite.