

<http://www.ironwooddailyglobe.com/1125ssri.htm>

Antidepressants under scrutiny

Published Friday, November 25, 2005 11:24:04 AM Central Time

By MARGARET LEVRA

Globe Staff Writer

Experts agree that withdrawal from antidepressant medications must be done under a controlled environment, or it could result in tragedy.

Mark Laguna, 40, of Pence, Wis., is currently lodged in the Iron County jail, facing a first-degree intentional homicide charge for the March 16 shooting death of his wife Brenda.

Laguna is taking two well-known Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors, Celexa, and Wellbutrin, along with Ceroquel, for schizophrenia, and Xanax.

Defense attorney Fred Bourg from the public defender's office in Ashland, Wis., is attempting to have Laguna transferred to a mental health facility to be evaluated and weaned from these medications before his February trial.

For withdrawal without complications, the dosage of an SSRI must be decreased over a period of time, said Karen Barth-Menzies, with the Baumhedlund Law Firm in Los Angeles on Thursday. Barth-Menzies is the lead attorney for withdrawal cases involving SSRIs.

SSRIs are "extremely powerful drugs, designed to alter a person's brain chemistry. They can cause a person to completely change behavior -- change their way of thinking and cause them to become psychotic." The drugs cause "severe agitation and suicide to some, and it causes others to commit acts of violence against others," she said.

She noted side effects "can occur on any dosage fluctuation."

Having dealt with the violent side effects of SSRIs, Barth-Menzies said, "Sometimes they do not even realize what they did. It's basically a psychotic break. They have no control of what they are doing at the time, followed by disbelief. What happened? Who did that? How did that happen?"

Barth-Menzies said there are millions of people in the country on these medications.

"From what we can tell, 3 to 5 percent of the population will have suicidal or violent reactions, either harm against self or harm against others," she said.

Dr. Joseph Glenmullen, a clinical instructor in psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, said withdrawal from SSRIs should be done under a controlled environment.

On Tuesday, Glenmullen said he could not comment on possible effects on Laguna from SSRI withdrawal without more in-depth information.

Glenmullen recently testified in a Federal Drug Administration hearing that resulted in the recent warning that antidepressants make patients, including children and adolescents, suicidal.

The warning covers 10 of the current popular antidepressants, Prozac, Zoloft, Paxil, Effexor, Celexa, Lexapro, Wellbutrin, Luvox, Remeron and Serzone.

Safety of Drugs

In his publication, "Suicides and Homicides in Patients Taking Paxil, Prozac, and Zoloft: Why They Keep Happening -- And Why They Will Continue," California author Jay S. Cohen M.D. wrote from almost the day that they were introduced in the late 1980s and early 1990s, sudden, unexpected suicides and homicides have been reported in patients taking serotonin-enhancing antidepressants such as Prozac, Paxil and Zoloft. "I'm not surprised this problem hasn't disappeared, nor will it unless we look deeper," he wrote.

Cohen said the selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors help millions of people, but, "any drug that can cause positive changes in people's brains can also cause negative ones, unless care is taken to avoid it."

SSRIs could create a unique combination of side effects that might severely impair judgment and impulse control, Cohen noted. SSRIs can also cause a severe degree of agitation or restlessness that may become intolerable and reduce impulse control, he wrote. Impulsive behavior, especially if coupled with impaired cognitive functioning, can be dangerous, he added.

Any psychiatrist will tell you that excessive doses of antidepressants can cause brain dysfunctions, including disorientation, confusion, and cognitive disturbances, Cohen said.

Antidepressants can also trigger similar, manic-like symptoms in people whose depression is part of a manic-depressive syndrome, which often gets overlooked when people are given SSRIs.

"Some of these individuals may have serious adverse reactions to antidepressants, including irritability, aggression, and mania," wrote Dr. Ronald Pies, professor of psychiatry at Tufts University.

FAIR USE NOTICE: This may contain copyrighted (©) material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. Such material is made available for educational purposes, to advance understanding of human rights, democracy, scientific, moral, ethical, and social justice issues, etc. It is believed that this constitutes a 'fair use' of any such copyrighted material as provided for in Title 17 U.S.C. section 107 of the US Copyright Law. This material is distributed without profit.