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Gabapentin and pregabalin use in Italy: evaluation of use and appropriateness in General Practice

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Background and Aim: Since January 2007, the Italian National Health System took a health-policy intervention by restricting the refundability of pregabalin and gabapentin. The aims of this study were: to explore the trend in the use of gabapentin and pregabalin in a general practice setting; to analyse the predictors of inappropriate use of these drugs.

Methods: We analysed a population of almost 150.000 individuals registered in 123 general practitioners' (GP) lists. Patients who received at least one prescription of gabapentin or pregabalin were identified. Over the study years, one-year prevalence and incidence of use of these drugs was measured.

Results: Gabapentin incidence of use dropped from 55.4/10000 inhabitants in 2005 to 10.4 in 2011. On the contrary, pregabalin prescription raised from 30.5/10000 inhabitants in 2005 to 47.7 in 2011 with a peak to 106.1 in 2006. Inappropriate prescriptions account for almost 55% of all prescriptions of gabapentin or pregabalin. GP characteristics mainly associated to inappropriate prescriptions were: male gender, shorter career duration, higher number of patients registered in GPs lists and higher number of patients treated/1000 patients. Inappropriate prescriptions were more frequent if filled to females and patients older than 71. Concomitant diseases as diabetes or neoplasm were associated with higher appropriateness; conversely prescriptions in patients affected by mood disorders and arthritis were more frequently inappropriate. Moreover, concurrent prescriptions of antidepressants, antipsychotics, proton pump inhibitors and antiosteoporotics were related to higher risk of inappropriateness. Conversely, the concomitant use of analgesic drugs, especially opioids reduced the risk of gabapentin or pregabalin inappropriate use.

Conclusion: This study documented a significant rate of inappropriate prescriptions in clinical practice. The restriction of refund criteria reduced by about 4 times their incidence of use. However it was not able to contain pregabalin use, which progressively raised to pre-note levels.