

Primum Non Nocere



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In this issue of *The Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology: In Practice*, side effects of drugs used in allergy-immunology are explored and discussed. This is an important topic to clinicians and patients because all medications are imperfect and have risks and conversations about such risks occur routinely.

Helping patients understand their own level of acceptable risk begins with first communicating the balance between the benefits and the potential harms of recommended therapies. Education about risk assessment and risk communication is key, and in this issue, Clarridge et al¹ provide a helpful overview of U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval and labelling. Once approved, labelling information is a primary tool for communicating valuable information about medications. At the same time, the use of some labelling approaches, such as black-box warnings, can present barriers to appropriate medication use in some patients. To address this, Greiwe et al² review the importance of shared decision making in discussing risks and benefits of allergy-immunology medications with black box warnings. Black box warnings may be applied from an abundance of caution and, unfortunately, can be difficult to remove, even when accrued data have been reassuring. Similarly, patients and providers frequently use U.S. Food and Drug Administration—approved medications off-label, and Greiwe et al² also provide guidance to inform shared decision-making conversations when using this common approach to patient management.

Allergist-immunologists treat a wide range of illness, ranging from mild to severe, with medical recommendations that may include affordable over-the-counter therapies to expensive immunosuppressive and immunomodulatory agents. In walking the line between risks and benefits, Mustafa and colleagues³ present an excellent review of medications used to address the manifestations of primary immunodeficiency diseases, with a particular focus on

side effects of immunosuppressive agents used to address autoimmune manifestations of disease in this population. The authors review important information about specific agents, highlighting risk assessment, monitoring, and management. Continuing with the matter of complex medication management, Joshi et al⁴ review adverse reactions to biologic agents used in the allergy-immunology clinic, and Kocaturk et al⁵ discuss safety, adverse effects, and monitoring of agents used to treat refractory spontaneous urticaria. The authors provide an overview of the assessment of adverse reactions to anti-inflammatories and biologics and discuss specific agents used in both allergy and immunology.

Several articles address side effects of over-the-counter medications used in allergy-immunology. Addressing perhaps the most well-known allergy medication of all-time, Wolfson et al⁶ ask of diphenhydramine, “is it time to move on?” This article highlights important considerations when choosing between this commonly used first-generation antihistamine and alternatives that are equally efficacious with less risk, making clear the importance of patient and provider education to reverse a culture of first-generation antihistamine use that continues to pervade medicine and larger society. Patient engagement is central to any medical encounter, and Skoner et al⁷ focus on balancing benefits with possible harms of medications used in children by providing guidance on how the allergist-immunologist may best address the frequently encountered question, “is this medication safe for my child?”

Despite availability without a prescription, many over-the-counter treatment options have risks that may not be understood by patients and their families, and both natural products and antacid medications are good examples. In this month's issue, Robinson and Ruffner⁸ review benefits and risks of proton pump inhibitors, helping to provide direction not only about side effects but also current proton pump inhibitor recommendations and approaches to therapeutic de-escalation. Finally, Soffer et al⁹ review safety considerations of natural products that patients may elect to use in the management of atopic disease. Patients often inquire about such natural products with their allergy/immunology physician, and this article provides a helpful knowledge base.

This month's issue of *The Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology: In Practice* is a gem, packed full of articles that are highly relevant to our daily practice of allergy-immunology. Navigating conversations about risk can be challenging but this issue provides a contemporary update to foster the informed dialogue. Our thanks to the authors of this theme issue for providing important education and guidance to improve the lives of patients we care for every day and helping each of us to “first, do no harm.”

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