1-136 Cognitive Enhancer – Benefits

TIPS Question:

Is Aricept used to treat behaviour issues associated with dementia or just to maintain memory?

If no significant changes have been made, should it be discontinued?

Response:

This is a most interesting question as it lets us go back to the Psychotropic Template. Looking at Aricept (which is a cholenergic drug) it was developed as a cognitive enhancer, i.e. improvement of memory. There is, however, research being conducted to examine other benefits. For example, cholenergic drugs have been found to have some benefit in people with apathy and attention difficulties. Still other research is looking at the benefit of the cholenergic drugs being used for behaviour.

The actual possible benefit from a cognitive enhancer therefore has to be evaluated on multiple parameters. Often our Partners-in-Care – i.e. friends and family who know the person better than we do, may be able to pick up more subtle improvements that care providers may miss. I have also had the experience of only knowing there was a positive effect (this time on behaviour) when the medication was decreased and behavioural problems emerged! There may be incidents when Aricept may actually precipitate increased confusion as an adverse side effect.

Current research looking at cognitive enhancers is investigating other alternate uses including the use in Lewy Bodies Dementia to help relieve the distress caused by this illness.

References:

McKeith, I., Grace, J.B. , Walker, Z, Byrne, E.J., Wilkenson, D., Stevens, T. & Perry, E.K.. rivastigmine in the treatment of dementia with Lewy bodies: preliminary findings from an open trial. Int. Journal of Ger. Psych. 15, 387-392 (2000).

Also, visit: http://www.mentalhealth.com/fr30.html

Please note: *TIPS information should be used similar to the way you would use information from a text book! TIPS is not intended to serve as an individual consultation service! P.I.E.C.E.S. participants should use this information in context and always work closely with the family physician involved in the care of the resident or client and with other Partners In Care to find solutions to individual resident/client issues.*