

Bupropion Effective for Smokers with Schizophrenia

VISN 1 MIRECC researchers have found that the anti-smoking drug, bupropion, results in substantially improved quit rates in cigarette smokers diagnosed with schizophrenia. Those on bupropion achieved a 50% abstinence rate after 10 weeks of treatment while only 12.5% of patients on placebo were abstinent. Bupropion has FDA approval as an aid for smoking cessation but its efficacy had not been previously established for smokers with serious mental disorders like schizophrenia. Compared with the general population, patients with schizophrenia are 2-3 times more likely to be tobacco dependent and are much more likely to fail when they attempt to stop smoking. People with schizophrenia are thought to have especially severe problems with quitting smoking because nicotine from the cigarettes counteracts negative schizophrenia symptoms such as apathy, depressed mood and difficulty concentrating. Stopping smoking can worsen these negative schizophrenia symptoms. In this study, bupropion had an impact both on smoking cessation and reduction of negative symptoms, suggesting that this medicine provided a substitute for the desirable effects of smoking while avoiding the many negative health consequences, such as lung and heart disease. The medication was well tolerated and dry mouth was the only side effect that was significantly more common in the bupropion group when compared with placebo. Notably, bupropion was most beneficial for patients who were treated with new-generation, "atypical" anti-psychotic medications for their schizophrenia and less helpful for those treated on "typical" agents. Currently, the great majority of Veterans Administration patients with schizophrenia are treated with "atypical" antipsychotic medications and would be likely to benefit from bupropion if they are motivated to quit smoking. The research group was led by MIRECC investigators Tony George, Bruce Rounsaville and Thomas Kosten and included Yale University researchers Jennifer Vessicchio, Angelo Termine, Thomas Bregartner and Alan Feingold.