Research Article

A study on prescription analysis and utilization of antibiotics in geriatric in-patients admitted in Shimoga institute of medical sciences tertiary care hospital, Shimoga, Karnataka, India

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Received: 14 March 2016
Accepted: 15 April 2016

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ABSTRACT

Background: Geriatrics is concerned with population aged 60 and above. Elderly suffer from various problems of the old age and hence prone to suffer from various adverse effects due to multiple drug use. In this regard rational use of drugs assumes importance. Hence the present study was conducted to study the rationality of prescriptions and utilization of antibiotics in the geriatric age group.

Methods: 126 inpatient prescriptions were chosen and analysed for their rationality according to WHO core drug use indicators. The prescriptions were chosen randomly during the months of July to November 2013 from inpatients at district Mcgann teaching hospital. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse data.

Results: 97% of total drugs prescribed were from essential drug list (EDL). Cephalosporins were the most commonly prescribed group of antibiotics. Respiratory diseases were the maximum cause of admission to the hospital followed by cardiovascular diseases. Prescription by brand name was 57.93% while generic drug prescription was 40.65% of total drugs prescribed. 7.81% of total drugs were prescribed as fixed drug combination average of 6.25 drugs were prescribed per person and 1.39% of prescriptions were illegible.

Conclusions: Most of drugs prescribed were from WHO model list of essential drugs which conforms to WHO rational drug use. Also prescription by generic name has to be emphasized to promote rationality of prescriptions. Antibiotic prescriptions should be preceded by microbiological testing wherever indicated and illegible prescriptions should be prevented at all costs. Adherence to guidelines regarding drug use in the elderly can help in rational drug use in elderly.

Keywords: Prescription, Geriatric, Antibiotics, EDL, Rational prescribing.

INTRODUCTION

Ageing can be described as a progressive functional decline or a gradual deterioration of physiological function with age.1 The national policy on older persons adopted by government of India in 1999 defines senior citizen or elderly as a person who is 60 years or above.2

The word geriatrics is derived from Greek word ‘geras’ meaning ‘old age’ and ‘iatrika’ meaning ‘medical treatment’. Ignatz Leo Nascher coined the term geriatrics in 1909. The royal college of physicians (London) describes geriatric medicine as that branch of general medicine concerned with the clinical, preventive, remedial and social aspects of illness in older people”.3 The elderly are prone to various problems like musculoskeletal stiffness, poor nutrition, sexual dysfunction etc. The presentations of diseases are also particular to older population. These presentations of diseases have been described as the “giants of geriatrics”4 The modern geriatric giants in elderly people
are: “Instability, incontinence, intellectual impairment, incoherence (delirium), insulin resistance, immobility, inanition (malnutrition), and impoverishment”. India has around 100 million elderly populations and is expected to further increase to 323 million, constituting 20% of total population by 2050.\(^5\)

**The prescribing process is complex and consists of various steps**\(^6\)

- Determining that the drug to be given is actually correct to the particular patient
- Selecting the best drug from among the available drug groups
- Selecting the appropriate dose and frequency of administration of drugs
- Regular and periodic monitoring for the drug’s effectiveness and adverse effects
- Educating the patient about expected side effects relating to drug use.

Elderly tend to suffer from multiple comorbid age related illnesses like hypertension, diabetes mellitus etc. and also have age related changes in pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics of drugs like changes in renal and hepatic function, changes in drug absorption, altered protein binding, the apparent volume of distribution may be decreased in elderly because of changes in lean body mass. These changes increases the chances of adverse drug events and drug-drug interactions because of multiple medications prescribed in this age group.\(^7\) In one study by Munir pir Mohammed et al drug related hospitalizations accounted for 2.4 to 6.5% of all medical admissions in the general population.\(^8\) In another study by Samoy L J et al the frequency of drug related hospitalizations was 24.1% of which 72.1% were preventable.\(^9\) Another study by Silverman JB et al showed that overall rate of adverse drug reactions is estimated to be 6.5 per 100 admissions, 28% of which are preventable.\(^10\)

Polypharmacy is defined as the prescription, administration or use of more medication than are clinically indicated or when a medical regimen includes at least one unnecessary medication and it occurs in 20-40% of older people.\(^11,12\) Now a day’s poly-pharmacy is used to denote that a particular patient receives too many drugs, drugs for too long a time or drugs in exceedingly high dose. Thus poly-pharmacy increases the chances of “prescribing cascades”.\(^13\) Prescribing cascades occur when a new drug is prescribed to treat symptoms arising from unrecognized adverse drug event relating to the concurrent treatment.

Rational drug prescribing is defined as the use of least number of drugs to obtain the best possible effect in shortest period and at a reasonable cost.\(^14\) The five important criteria for rational drug use are accurate diagnosis, proper prescribing, correct dispensing, suitable packing and patient adherence.\(^15\) The rational use of drugs requires that patients receive medications appropriate to their clinical needs, in doses that meet their own individual requirements for an adequate period of time and at the lowest cost to them and their community.\(^16\) Inappropriate prescribing is that when alternate therapy that is either more effective or associated with a lower risk exists to treat the same condition. The study of prescribing patterns seeks to monitor, evaluate and if necessary suggest modification in prescribing patterns so as to make medical care rational and cost effective.\(^17\)

The rational use of drugs depends upon three perspectives namely patient, physician and healthcare perspectives. The drug use indicators recommended by WHO cover all three perspectives.\(^18\) Hence the present study was undertaken to study the rationality of prescriptions and utilization pattern of antibiotics at SIMS tertiary care hospital and teaching centre.

**METHODS**

The study was cross-sectional retrospective carried on geriatric inpatients admitted in McGann teaching hospital attached to Shimoga institute of medical sciences (SIMS). The study carried out in 126 patients admitted during the period of July 2013 to November 2013 by detailed analysis of case records of geriatric inpatients. WHO core drug use indicators along with other parameters were included in our study.\(^18\)

Demographic characteristics studied were age, sex etc. The age groups were divided into three categories categorized based on legibility and further the legible prescriptions were subcategorized based on generic and brand names. Disorders responsible for admission were based on the system involved like GIT, blood, bones, reproductive system etc. The antibiotics used were categorized based on groups. The duration of stay by the patient was also recorded. The percentage of prescriptions where an injection was prescribed was also recorded.

- Age and sex statistics
- Average number of drugs per prescription
- Duration of stay and disease cause of admissions
- Percentage of drug with an antibiotic prescribed
- Percentage of drugs prescribed by their generic name
- Percentage of prescriptions with injection prescribed
- Percentage of drugs prescribed from essential drug list or formulary.

The age groups were divided into three categories; 60-65 years, 66-70 years and above 70 years age group. The sexes of patients were grouped into male and female patients. The prescriptions were categorized as legible or illegible based on readability of prescriptions. The legible prescriptions were further subcategorized based on generic or brand names. Disorders responsible for admission were based on system involved like GIT,
blood, skeletal, reproductive systems etc. the antibiotics used were categorized based on various groups of antibiotics given. The duration of stay by the patient was also analysed.

RESULTS

![Figure 1: Age group of patients.](image1)

- Patients above 70 years accounted for 34.14% of total inpatients admitted (Figure 1).
- Males accounted for 56.69% of inpatients while females comprised 43.31% of inpatients (Figure 2).
- Prescribing by brand name was 57.93% while generic drug prescribing comprised 40.68% of total prescriptions (Figure 3).
- 7.81% of total drugs prescribed were in form of fixed dose combinations.
- 56.93% of total drugs prescribed were in form of injections.
- Averages of 6.25 drugs were prescribed per person.
- 97% of total drugs prescribed were from essential drug list.
- 1.39% of prescriptions were illegible.
- Respiratory disease were the maximum cause of hospital admissions (19.33%) followed by cardiovascular diseases (15.79%) (Figure 4).
- Cephalospirin’s were most commonly prescribed antibiotics (39.83%) followed by penicillin group of drugs (Figure 5).
- The total duration of stay in the hospital was maximum in the 3-5 days treatment group (Figure 6).

![Figure 2: Sex of inpatients.](image2)

![Figure 3: Percentage of prescriptions prescribed by generic, brand names and percentage of illegible prescriptions.](image3)

![Figure 4: Percentage of diseases causing admission in the hospital.](image4)

![Figure 5: Percentage of antibiotics prescribed.](image5)

![Figure 6: Duration of stay in the hospital.](image6)
Out of total 126 patients males were 56.69% of patients and females were 43.31% of inpatients. Based on age of patients 45% of patients were 60-65 years of age, 20% of patients 66-70 years of age and 35% patients belonged to >70 years of age. Patients suffering from respiratory related diseases constituted 19.73% of inpatients followed by cardiovascular related 15.79%, GIT 12.5%, renal 0.66% and reproductive 0.66% was the other minor causes of admission to hospital. Regarding duration of stay in the hospital 8% of patients stayed for less than one day, 24% for 1-2 days, 34% for 3-5 days, 26% for 6-10 days, 3% for 11-15 days while 4% of patients stayed for >15 days. 7.81% of total drugs were prescribed as fixed dose combinations. Prescribing by brand name was 57.93% while generic drug prescribing was 40.68% of total prescriptions. Averages of 6.25 drugs were prescribed per person. 97% of total drugs prescribed from essential drug list. Cephalosporin’s were the most commonly used antibiotic (39.83%) followed by penicillin group (19.49%),quinolones (14.41%), while tetracycline’s and anti-malarial were least used antibiotics 1.39% of prescriptions were illegible.

**DISCUSSION**

Patients at greatest risk of poly-pharmacy include\textsuperscript{19,20}

- Age 75 years and older and those suffering from multiple comorbid conditions.
- Recently hospitalized patients.
- Patients taking multiple medications (high risk-8 or more drugs, 5-7 drugs-moderate risk), OTC drugs.
- Patients with multiple physician prescriptions.
- Purchasing prescription medication from multiple pharmacies.

The elderly fulfil most of these criteria and hence a careful and periodic drugs review of prescription practices in the elderly is necessary.

In our present study persons aged more than 70 years accounted for 34.14% of total inpatients admitted among elderly, while 56.69% of these elderly patients were males, females constituted 43.31% of inpatients. Averages of 6.25 drugs were prescribed per person which is very high when compared to W.H.O prescribed average of two drugs per person.\textsuperscript{18} This gives an impression of poly-pharmacy which is not actually true as the above recommendation of WHO is would not be completely applicable to inpatients of the hospital.

Nearly 7.81% of total drugs prescribed were prescribed as fixed drug a combination which is not in the higher value range. Nearly 56.93% of total drugs were prescribed as an injection which is naturally expected because of inpatient nature of our study. Nearly 97% of total drugs prescribed were from EDL, this is much more than the study done by Ghosh et al where it was found that only 41.76% of drugs were prescribed form EDL.\textsuperscript{21} This could probably be because the patients being analysed were admitted to a tertiary care government teaching hospital. Regarding prescribing by brand name in our study it was found that nearly 57.93% of drugs were prescribed by brand name while generic drug prescribing was only 40.65% of total prescriptions. This result is nearly similar to their study by Joshi et al where nearly 53.6% of drugs were prescribed by their generic name.\textsuperscript{22}

Regarding percentage of antibiotics prescribed Cephalosporin’s were the most commonly prescribed antibiotics (39.83%) followed by penicillin group of antibiotics which is to be anticipated because of the inpatient nature of our study. However adequate microbiological cultures for antibiotic susceptibility was not performed in all the inpatients before commencing the antibiotics among inpatients, this factor could be improved by taking proper antibiotic susceptibility testing before starting antibiotics among inpatients.

Regarding number of prescriptions that were illegible or were having inadequate prescription information in our study was found to be 1.39%. This has to be absolutely avoided by taking proper precautions during prescription writing. With regard to the cause of admissions respiratory diseases were most common cause of admissions (19.33%) followed by cardiovascular diseases (15.79%).

In order to improve prescribing practices in the elderly various criteria have been put forth to improve prescribing practices these include:

- Beers criteria.\textsuperscript{23}
- STOPP (screening tool of older person’s prescriptions) and START (Screening tool to alert doctors to right treatment) criteria.\textsuperscript{24}
- Drug burden index (DBI).\textsuperscript{25}
- Improved prescribing in elderly tool (IPET).\textsuperscript{26}
- ACOVE (assessing care of vulnerable elders) indicators.\textsuperscript{27}
- FORTA (fit for the aged) list.\textsuperscript{28}

Use of the above methodologies and strategies most of the errors in prescribing in the elderly can be minimized as well as prevented to a great extent.

Also based on the above tools the following common guidelines can be made regarding prescribing in the elderly.

- Medication should be used only where necessary and which are familiar to the doctor.
- Make a proper diagnosis before prescribing and a careful drug history is essential.
- Changes in pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics of drugs in elderly should be considered before prescribing in elderly.
- Avoid prescribing cascade effect in elderly; remember that drugs themselves can cause illness.
- Periodic brown bag checkups should be done.
• Anticipate drug-drug interactions and measures should be taken to try to minimize them.
• Periodic and regular review of prescriptions should be done and unnecessary drugs should be removed wherever possible. Review medications at least twice in a year.
• Maintain a medication diary to accurately identify drugs being prescribed and involve caretakers wherever feasible.
• Elderly may be more sensitive to the effects of some drugs and reduced doses may be required in these age groups.
• Advice non-pharmacological therapies like yoga, regular physical exercise, reduction in salt intake where ever feasible in the elderly.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion the present study reveals that a more rational approach is necessary to prevent prescription patterns. Poly-pharmacy is widely prevalent which can cause adverse drug events these can be avoided by adhering to various criteria and tools for prescribing in the elderly. Males constituted majority of inpatients admitted but the difference among males and females patients was not very large. Nearly 56.93% of total drug were prescribed as injections which is considerably more than average because of inpatient nature of our study. Cephalosporins were most commonly prescribed antibiotics however antibiotic susceptibility test have to be performed before starting a new antibiotic. 97% of total drugs prescribed were from Essential drug list which is a good indicator of rational drug prescribing in our present study. The percentage of illegible prescriptions has to be brought down to improve rationality of prescriptions. Respiratory diseases were the major cause of admissions closely followed by cardiovascular diseases. In brief majority of deficiencies in the prescription practices can be avoided by following a proper approach to rational drug prescribing practices and by strictly adhering to the various standards laid down to improve prescribing practices in the elderly.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the director and the medical superintendent, Shivamogga Institute of Medical Sciences for their kind permission for allowing collecting the data for the study.

Funding: No funding sources
Conflict of interest: None declared
Ethical approval: The study was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee

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