

Clozapine in the treatment of refractory schizophrenia: Canadian policies and clinical guidelines.

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Clozapine is an atypical neuroleptic agent that has recently become available in Canada with potential clinical efficacy in the treatment of refractory schizophrenia, and in patients with schizophrenia neurologically intolerant to conventional neuroleptics. Although it causes few extra-pyramidal symptoms, the drug has a number of other adverse effects including a risk of agranulocytosis in one to two percent of all patients. Because of this, the use of the drug is permitted only if the white blood count is monitored weekly. The monitoring system, outlined in this article, requires a coordinated effort between clinical staff, pharmacy, laboratory and the Clozaril Support and Assistance Network. Clinical guidelines are proposed, detailing the indications and contraindications for treatment and the pharmacokinetics, dosing, adverse effects, and drug interactions with clozapine. In addition, the economics, government policies and implications for future research are considered. Although there are administrative and clinical difficulties associated with its use, clozapine represents an advance in therapeutic research. Patients and family members will be inquiring about the drug and may deserve a trial. This article aims to inform Canadian mental health professionals about the safe and beneficial use of clozapine.