

Product Liability Litigation May Jeopardize Treatment Outcomes For People With Severe Mental Illnesses

(NAPSA)—A new survey shows that fears raised by product liability litigation involving antipsychotic drugs may be putting patients with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder at risk for relapse. These fears add to the already heavy burden that patients face as they work with their treatment providers to improve their mental and physical health.

The survey, which was conducted among 402 psychiatrists who treat patients with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, showed that, even when patients were responding well to their prescribed antipsychotic treatment, many requested a medication change because these drugs are featured in law firm advertisements. Other patients stopped taking their medication, often without telling their psychiatrist, for the same reason.

"Many of our patients already struggle with accepting their illness and staying on their prescribed treatment, and now they are experiencing new levels of fear due to the increasing incidence of these jarring advertisements," said Dr. Ralph Aquila, assistant clinical professor of psychiatry, Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons; director, residential community services, St Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital Center, New York, N.Y. "This advertising is hindering the progress of therapy and disrupting the important relationship between patients and their healthcare providers."

Ninety-seven percent of surveyed psychiatrists had one or more patients who stopped taking medication or reduced their dosage. Of these psychiatrists, 52 percent believed patients took this action due to law firm advertisements about antipsychotic drugs. Of these psychiatrists, 93 percent stated that one or more of their patients made medication changes without consulting them first, and the majority of these psychiatrists (94 percent) reported patient

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relapse as a result of discontinuing medication.

The findings from this survey, which was commissioned by the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare and Eli Lilly and Company, confirm trends in clinical practice that many people in the mental health community have observed, but that have not been quantified until now.

The survey results are especially pertinent given the number of barriers that already exist in helping patients stay adherent to their treatment. Among the many challenges psychiatrists noted they faced when selecting an antipsychotic medication to treat schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, the five most challenging issues identified were side effects (75 percent), lack of adherence due to unwillingness to accept illness (73 percent), medication costs (58 percent), lack of adherence due to lack of support (50 percent), and co-occurring mental illnesses (49 percent).

Additionally, more than half (55 percent) of surveyed psychiatrists indicated that they had changed their prescribing practices over the last five years due to product liability cases involving antipsychotic medications—and reported frustration and concern that this type of litigation sometimes interferes with patient treatment.

Resources are available for clinicians who treat severe mental illness through the National Council at www.nccbh.org and Lilly at www.treatmentteam.com. Additional survey findings are also available on the National Council's Web site. The survey was funded by Lilly.