

## BRIEF COMMUNICATION

# Efficacy of Trazodone as an Anti Obsessional Agent

ASHOKA PRASAD<sup>1</sup>

*Research Psychiatrist, University of Leeds, Metabolic Research Unit, High Royds Hospital  
MENSTON, Ilkley., West Yorkshire, LS29 6AQ*

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PRASAD, A. *Efficacy of trazodone as an anti obsessional agent.* PHARMACOL BIOCHEM BEHAV 22(2) 347-348, 1985.—Eight patients with chronic Obsessive-Compulsive Neurosis were subjected to Trazodone, an antidepressant acting on the serotonergic system. After 4 weeks of treatment, 6 showed significant reduction in the obsessional symptoms which was sustained after a 6-week follow-up. The 2 patients who did not show improvement had a significantly higher trait score than the others on psychometric ratings.

Obsessive-compulsive neurosis    Serotonin    Trazodone    Leyton obsessional inventory  
Montgomery Asberg scale

OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE Neurosis is a relatively rare condition (less than 1% of the general population). It is characterised by recurrent thoughts and ideas recognised by patients as ego dystonic. It has been a subject of much psychodynamic scrutiny. Janet [8] considered it to be a form of psychaesthesia. Anna Freud [5] explained it in terms of "increase in the intensity of anal-sadistic tendencies." However, the disease is notoriously unresponsive to psychodynamic treatments.

The two favoured biological explanations offered so far have implied that the condition is linked to frontal lobe dysfunction [4] and that there is relative deficit of serotonin in the brain of these subjects [7].

Because of an incomplete understanding of the disorder, treatment approaches have largely been empirical. The most popular approach is the behavioural one advocated by Marks. [9]. One big disadvantage with this approach is that it entails a high degree of motivation for compliance which is not always possible.

The first pharmacological breakthrough towards treatment of this condition came from Capstick [2] who claimed success using Clomipramine an antidepressant acting on the serotonergic system. This important finding went largely unnoticed until Asberg and her colleagues [1] conducted a large controlled trial with the same drug and reported success. Similar results were obtained by Montgomery [10] and Insel *et al.* [6]. Prasad [12] conducted a double-blind trial with Zimelidine, another antidepressant acting on the serotonergic system and Imipramine. He found the former to have a significant anti-obsessional effect in addition to its antidepressant efficacy.

Since the last trial was conducted, Zimelidine has been withdrawn from the market following adverse reports.

Clomipramine is still available but has the disadvantage of precipitating unpleasant side-effects.

Trazodone, a relatively new antidepressant which acts on the serotonergic system [13] was tried to see if it had anti-obsessional effects similar to Clomipramine or Zimelidine.

### METHOD

Eight patients suffering from this condition were selected for the trial. All of them fulfilled the DSM-III criteria and had had the illness for more than five years. They had been attending the psychology clinics for behavioural treatments which had brought only temporary relief. The nature of the trial was explained to them and their consent obtained.

They were then psychometrically rated on the Leyton inventory [3] for obsessional symptoms and Montgomery Asberg Scale [11] for depression. They were then subjected to Trazodone for a period of 4 weeks.

After this period they were re-rated on both the scales and followed up for 6 weeks.

### Demographic Characteristics

(a) Age: The mean age of the patients was 39.42, the range being 24-46; (b) Sex: The female: male ratio was 5:3; (c) Marital status: Six out of eight patients were married; (d) Duration of illness: All the patients had had obsessional symptoms for more than five years and had sought psychiatric help in the past.

### RESULTS

Results are illustrated in Table 1. It becomes obvious from a careful perusal that the patients who did not score highly on psychometric trait evaluation respond quite well to the drug. There was no significant effect on the trait scores.

<sup>1</sup>Present address: Kate Stillman Lecturer in Psychiatry, Queen Charlotte's Hospital, London W6-OXG, England.

TABLE 1

Patient No.	Beginning of Trial							After 4 weeks						
	Leyton Inventory							Leyton Inventory						
	Montgomery Asberg Scale	Total Trait Score	Trait resistance	Trait interference	Total symptom	Symptom interference	Symptom resistance	Montgomery Asberg Scale	Total Trait	Trait resistance	Trait interference	Total symptom	Symptom interference	Symptom resistance
1.	18	22	54	76	36	58	72	16	20	54	78	34	60	78
2.	24	24	58	74	38	60	80	15	24	56	76	38	58	77
3.	20	8	12	12	32	62	72	15	8	16	28	12	22	34
4.	14	6	10	12	30	58	70	14	6	12	12	10	20	28
5.	24	8	16	30	28	56	74	16	10	18	34	12	24	28
6.	22	6	16	24	38	60	74	20	8	20	30	14	24	36
7.	26	6	12	18	36	62	76	22	6	12	28	16	28	38
8.	18	10	18	28	34	50	72	18	10	18	28	10	22	40

## DISCUSSION

As stated earlier, the subject of link between serotonergic system and obsessional illness has aroused a great deal of interest. Trazodone is a drug which acts primarily through serotonergic mediation.

In this trial, it appears to have had an effect on obsessional symptoms (which was sustained over a six week follow-up) in patients who did not score highly on psychometric evaluation of traits and this seems relatively independent of the improvement in the scores for depression (as none of the patients scored more than 26 on the scale which would indicate a depression of only a mild nature).

The limited number of patients in the trial calls for a guarded interpretation. The purpose of this trial is to provoke further researches into the link between serotonergic system and obsessional illness. If this hypothesis is proven, it would result in significant addition to our therapeutic pharmacological armamentarium.

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