

## Journal Watch

### **The Efficacy of Haloperidol in the Management of Nausea and Vomiting in Persons with Cancer.**

**Reference:** Hardy JR, O'Shea A, White C, et al. J of Pain and Symptom Management 2010; 40: 11-116

**Presenter:** Dr. D. Oneschuk, on July 15, 2010, Tertiary Palliative Care Unit, Grey Nuns Hospital

**Abstract: Context.** Haloperidol is used commonly for the control of nausea and vomiting in palliative care patients, but there is very little evidence to support its use.

**Objectives.** To assess the efficacy of haloperidol as an antiemetic in patients with cancer and N/V not related to cancer treatment.

**Methods.** Patients with an N/V score of at least 1 on a 4-point scale were prescribed either oral or subcutaneous haloperidol/ N/V and toxicity were assessed daily for the duration of the study (maximum 5 days) by both the patient and an observer (health professional).

**Results.** At Day 2, 33 of 42 (79 %) treated patients were assessable for response. Eight (24%; 95% confidence interval {CI}: 10%-39%) patients had complete control of N/V and 12 (36%; 95% CI: 20%-53%) had partial control, giving an overall response rate of 61% (95% CI: 44%-77%). At Day 5, 23 patients were assessable for response. The overall response rate was 17 of 23 (74%; 95% CI 56%-92%). If all patients are included in the response analysis, the overall response rates at Days 2 and 5 were 47% and 40%, respectively.

**Conclusion.** Haloperidol has some efficacy in the treatment of N/V in this patient group. The results from this uncontrolled study provide pilot data from which to plan future controlled trials of antiemetics in the palliative care population.

#### Strengths:

A good attempt at an antiemetic trial despite the number of shortcomings were identified by the authors. The authors should be commended for maintaining the trial open for accrual for a period of just less than 2 years.

#### Weaknesses:

Many identified by the authors:

- Limited (5 day),

- Uncontrolled open label trial with limited accrual and high attrition rate.

- Single assessment scale used to evaluate nausea and vomiting responses.

- Exclusion criteria were numerous likely impacting accrual rates.

- Level of initial dosing of haloperidol was selected based on 'the treatment level thought appropriate for that patient.'

Further explanation of the latter is not provided.

Relevance to Palliative Care: There is a strong need for well conducted comparative trials of antiemetics for nausea and vomiting in patients with advanced cancer. Despite the numerous weaknesses, this small study is a step in the right direction.