

A 35-year-old female client diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), Nia Omari came into clinic with complaint of decreased libido, insomnia, and weight gain after 6 months of taking sertraline (Zoloft) 50 mg PO one time daily. It has reduced her original symptoms of anxiety but created side effects which are unpleasant to her and would like to find a different medication with less side effects. Nia has an allergy to Penicillin, has never smoked cigarettes, and does not drink. Her physical assessment is considered unremarkable.

According to the CPG, in this case it is appropriate to try another SSRI for Nia to try and reduce the side effects she is experiencing and unhappy with. In this case escitalopram (Lexapro), 10 mg once daily is the choice of treatment. This treatment should begin once the sertraline dosing has been discontinued as concurrent use of sertraline and escitalopram is contraindicated due to the possibility of serotonin syndrome. The dose of 10 mgs may need to be titrated up to achieve therapeutic levels for her. Nia will have to be monitored for increased anxiety, increased restlessness (akathisia), and suicidal behavior as these can be side effects of any SSRI. (Luu et al., 2021; NICE, 2023; Rosenthal & Burchum, 2021).

In my professional assessment of this client, I have some questions. I would ask her about her insomnia. Is the insomnia due to restlessness or physical movement she is not use to her body doing? Does she suffer from pacing, rocking, picking, or rubbing of her hands as these things can be signs of akathisia and are a serious side effect of SSRI medications. I would ask Nia about her physical activity. Does she exercise regularly? As this can make a difference in sleep and help with the side effect of weight gain. It can also help with mental health and anxiety by reducing stress and creating a normal pattern of physical endurance and relaxation. The case study states she does not smoke cigarettes, but does she smoke marijuana or use edibles? Marijuana use and edibles can help to relax but can also be known to cause anxiety and food cravings. Does she use any natural remedies such as ashwagandha or chamomile to help with her anxiety that is not a prescribed therapy? Has anyone recommended she try any therapies such as cognitive behavioral therapy, exercise, or meditation to help with her anxiety? This is not to say that it will work but it may help her to have better control of her GAD and better her overall mental health. She also needs to be educated on the fact that the medication being prescribed is in the same SSRI category and can have some of the same side effects as the previous medication. Should she have symptoms of anorexia, headaches, diarrhea, weight gain, or continued sexual side effects, there may be a need to find another route of treatment (Luu et al., 2021; NICE, 2023; Rosenthal & Burchum, 2021). Nia will need to follow up within the next 6 weeks to evaluate her progress with this medication.

Melissa

References

Luu, B., Kayingo, G., & Hass, V.M. (2021). *Advanced pharmacology for prescribers*. Springer Publishing LLC.