Risk of suicidal ideation almost double with antiepileptics

An analysis by the US FDA of 199 placebo-controlled clinical studies involving 11 different antiepileptic drugs* revealed that the risk of suicidal ideation or behaviour is almost double in patients receiving antiepileptic drugs than in those receiving placebo.

The analysis included 43 892 patients (aged ≥ 5 years) who were randomised to receive antiepileptic drugs (n = 27 863) or placebo; the conditions studied in the trials included epilepsy, psychiatric disorders like anxiety, depression and bipolar disorder, and other conditions like neuropathic pain syndromes and migraine.

Four completed suicides were observed in the antiepileptic drug group and none in the placebo group. Risk of suicidal ideation and suicidal behaviour was significantly higher in the antiepileptic group than in the placebo group. Overall, 0.43% of the antiepileptic recipients and 0.22% of the placebo recipients experienced suicidal ideation or behaviour; an estimated 2.1 per 1000 more patients in the antiepileptic drug group experienced suicidal ideation or behaviour than in the placebo group. The increase in risk was observed as early as 1 week after drug initiation and continued to at least 24 weeks. The relative risk for suicidal ideation or behaviour was higher for patients with epilepsy than in those with psychiatric or other disorders.

* carbamazepine, felbamate, gabapentin, lamotrigine, levetiracetam, oxcarbazepine, pregabalin, tiagabine, topiramate, valproic acid and zonisamide

US Food & Drug Administration. Information for healthcare professionals: suicidality and antiepileptic drugs. Internet Document : [4 pages], 31 Jan 2008. Available from: URL: http://www.fda.gov 801052460

» **Editorial comment:** Following the US FDA's alert, a similar alert has been issued in New Zealand (see this issue, p 3; 809084802).