Donepezil in the treatment of mild to moderate senile dementia of the Alzheimer type (SDAT)

Stein K

Record Status
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Citation
Stein K. Donepezil in the treatment of mild to moderate senile dementia of the Alzheimer type (SDAT) Southampton: Wessex Institute for Health Research and Development (WIHRD) 1997

Authors' objectives
Donepezil is a new drug treatment, recently licensed in the UK, for use in mild to moderate dementia due to senile dementia of the Alzheimer type (SDAT). The author assesses whether it should be made available to all patients with mild to moderate SDAT.

Authors' conclusions
The effectiveness of donepezil in routine clinical practice remains uncertain, and the external validity of the clinical trials to date is, necessarily, limited. It is not clear how response to treatment should be measured in routine practice, although dose escalation and continuation of treatment will demand accurate assessment. It may be argued that the size of benefits is so small that the risk of greater side effects in more typical people with SDAT, many of whom have co-morbidity and may already be on other drugs, make it difficult to conclude on overall effectiveness. Evidence is limited in quantity and by restriction to select population. The author concludes that there is evidence of temporary benefit but at considerable cost. Further research is needed in this area.

Project page URL
http://www.wihrd.soton.ac.uk

Indexing Status
Subject indexing assigned by CRD

MeSH
Alzheimer Disease /drug therapy; Costs and Cost Analysis; Dementia /drug therapy

Language Published
English

Country of organisation
England

Address for correspondence
Pauline King. Wessex Institute for Health Research and Development, Boldrewood Medical School, Bassett Crescent East, Highfield, Southampton SO16 7PX. Tel. +44 1703 595661 Fax +44 1703 595662

AccessionNumber
31998008887

Date bibliographic record published
14/08/1998
Date abstract record published
14/08/1998