

Comments on Dhevender Bhalla *et al.* “Anti-epileptic drugs: Is terminology appropriate: A change might be needed”

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Devender Bhalla and his international colleagues¹ raise some valid objections to the term “anti-epileptic drug” on the grounds that it is stigmatizing and inaccurate.

The term “epileptic” is criticized as being pejorative but this is so only if it used as a noun to refer to people with epilepsy. It is not pejorative when used as an adjective – for example, epileptic encephalopathy, epileptic seizure. Anti-epileptic surely means anti-disease rather than anti-patient.

The authors make the very valid point that anti-epileptic medications treat or prevent seizures but do not treat the many other aspects of epilepsy. However, it is probably preferable to the older term “anticonvulsant”, because these drugs treat non-convulsive seizures as well.

Devender Bhalla and colleagues¹ are also concerned that “drug” may be taken to mean non-therapeutic recreational substance and point out that in some languages, there is a term for such substances (usually with the same derivation as the English “drug”) that is distinct from that used for therapeutic substances. Indeed, English speaking patients may be confused if they are asked whether they are taking drugs. This can be overcome by using the term “medication” when referring to therapeutic drugs. However, while the term “drug” may be confusing when used alone, it is not confusing when qualified by the adjective “anti-epileptic”.

Epilepsy is contrasted with hypertension and diabetes. However, a closer comparison might be with another extremely stigmatizing disorder: psychosis. It is interesting that a suggestion was recently made to abandon the term “antipsychotic” and replace it with the drug’s mechanism of action.^{2,3} However, that is difficult where mechanisms are unknown or multiple.

Devender Bhalla and his colleagues¹ do not propose an alternative term but one that would address their concerns is “anti-seizure medication”

and indeed, this term has already achieved some currency in the non-academic literature: a Google search reveals 263,000 results compared to 709,000 for “anti-epileptic drug(s)”.⁴ However, it has yet to be widely adopted by medical authors, with Pubmed indexing only 160 papers containing “anti-seizure medication(s)” compared to 15,062 containing “anti-epileptic drug(s)”.⁵

REFERENCES

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