Paroxetine Eases Irritable Bowel Syndrome Effects

**BY MITCHEL L. ZOLER**  
Philadelphia Bureau

**NEW ORLEANS** — Treatment with paroxetine led to a significant improvement in the clinical status of patients with irritable bowel syndrome in a randomized, placebo-controlled study with 74 patients. Results from open-label studies had suggested that selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors might be beneficial for patients with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), but this was the first double-blind, placebo-controlled study to test the hypothesis, Prakash S. Masand, M.D., said in a poster presentation at the 24th Congress of the Collegium Internationale Neuro-Psy-chopharmacologicum.

The study’s primary efficacy end point was improvement in symptom severity based on a symptom diary. This analysis has not been completed. The current report focused on the study’s secondary efficacy end points: the percentage of patients with an increase of one or two points in their Clinical Global Impressions (CGI-I) scale score and the percentage of patients with a drop in their Clinical Global Impressions-Severity (CGI-S) scale score of at least 1 point. The study was funded by GlaxoSmithKline, which markets paroxetine (Paxil).

The study enrolled patients aged 18-75 years old who met the modified Rome II criteria for IBS and had IBS symptoms for at least 1 year. The average age of the patients was 49 years old; 81% were women, and 75% were white, said Dr. Masand, director of the psychopharmacology consultation program at Duke University in Durham, N.C. Of 92 patients screened, 76 met the entry criteria: 2 of these patients responded during the placebo run-in phase, and so were excluded. The remaining 74 patients were randomized to treatment with 12.5-50 mg of controlled-release paroxetine per day or placebo. Treatment continued for 12 weeks and then patients were tapered off of treatment. The average was 33 mg/day.

During the study, five patients dropped out from the paroxetine group and four from the placebo group. The efficacy analysis was done on an intention-to-treat basis with the last observation carried forward for the dropouts. With the efficacy criterion of an increase in the CGI-I score of 1 or 2 points, 26 patients in the paroxetine group met this standard (70%), compared with 15 in the placebo group (41%), a statistically significant difference, Dr. Masand reported. When the criterion of an improvement in the CGI-S scale of at least 1 point was used, 21 patients in the paroxetine group (57%) met this standard, compared with 10 (27%) in the placebo group, also a statistically significant difference. Common adverse effects were drowsiness in 36% of patients treated with paroxetine and 24% on placebo, and female genital disorders in 26% of paroxetine patients and 12% of placebo patients.

**Apnea and Hypoxia Are Rarely Associated With Reflux**

**BY DOUG BRUNK**  
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**NEW ORLEANS** — Sleep apnea and hypoxia are rarely associated with gastroesophageal reflux and probably are not important causes of increased acid exposure, Anthony DiMarino Jr., M.D., reported at the annual Digestive Disease Week.

“The cause of nocturnal acid reflux events is presumably due to transient lower esophageal sphincter relaxation,” said Dr. DiMarino, chief of the division of gastroenterology and hepatology at Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia. “It is not related to nocturnal respiratory changes of apnea or hypoxia.”

He and his associates studied 16 patients with self-described insomnia on two separate nights in the Prevalence and Etiology Disorders Center using simultaneous polysomnography and esophageal pH monitoring. The researchers noted each episode of sleep apnea, central sleep apnea, obstructive sleep apnea, hypopnea, hypoxia, and awakening (a period of wakefulness lasting for at least 15 seconds), and determined their relationship with gastroesophageal reflux events. A decrease in the esophageal pH below 4.0 was considered a significant reflux event. Reflux events were associated with arousals if they occurred 5 minutes prior to the sleep event.

The average age of patients was 41.3 years and their mean body mass index was 25 kg/m². Ten of the 16 patients were men.

The researchers recorded 240 apnea episodes, of which 13 were associated with reflux. Of the 27 obstructive apnea episodes, 1 was associated with reflux. “The majority of reflux events were not associated with apnea, and there was no consistent relationship of the reflux events to the type of apnea or hypopnea,” Dr. DiMarino said.

The researchers recorded 44 hypoxia events, of which 9 were associated with reflux. In addition, there were 61 awakenings associated with the 240 apnea episodes, and 27 awakenings associated with the 44 hypoxia events. This suggests that sleep awakenings are related to apnea and hypoxia, but they do not cause reflux as a secondary event, he said.