Press Statement 13 May 2010

The College of Psychiatry of Ireland

Antidepressant Medication - Clarification

In the past month there has been considerable discussion in Ireland of suicidality and homicidality as potential adverse effects of SSRI antidepressant medication. Much of this discussion has been speculative. Clearly, suicide and homicide are events of the utmost gravity and any possible role of any treatment in precipitating such tragedies warrants the most thorough investigation. However, discussion of the risks involved must be based on evidence rather than conjecture or unfounded opinion.

Untreated depression can have a fatal outcome. Those experiencing moderate to severe depression frequently describe having thoughts of self-harm. Antidepressants are effective in the treatment of depression. The effective treatment of depression is an important means of reducing suicide rates.

A huge volume of research in recent years has failed to establish a causal link between antidepressant use and suicide. At an individual level, the period early in treatment may be a time of relatively high risk, as treatment tends to start when the person's depression is severe and treatment takes some weeks to work. As treatment takes effect and energy and motivation return, people who have recently commenced antidepressant treatment may be more able to act on suicidal thoughts that are inherent to their condition. That the early recovery period is potentially a period of increased risk for suicidality is something of which all doctors should be aware. The College of Psychiatry of Ireland, in unison with the advice of the Irish Medicines Board, recommends close monitoring of all individuals commenced on antidepressant therapy.

There is no evidence of a link between antidepressant use and homicide.

A more detailed statement articulating the issues is available on the website of
The College of Psychiatry of Ireland, http://www.irishpsychiatry.ie

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