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Understanding Drug Reactions: Types, Causes, and Management

Chuen Khin*

Department of Pharmacology, University of Humber, Canada

DESCRIPTION

Drug reactions are a significant aspect of medical practice and patient safety, as they can range from mild to severe and have profound impacts on health outcomes. Understanding these reactions is crucial for both healthcare professionals and patients to ensure safe and effective treatment. Drug reactions can be classified into several categories based on their nature and onset: These occur when the immune system mistakenly identifies a drug as a harmful substance. Symptoms can range from mild rashes to severe anaphylaxis, a life-threatening condition that requires immediate treatment. Common examples include penicillin allergies and reactions to sulfa drugs. These are unintended and harmful effects occurring at normal doses. ADRs can be predictable, based on the drug's known pharmacological properties, or unpredictable. For example, using aspirin might lead to gastrointestinal bleeding, which is a known side effect, while an unexpected rash might occur with an antibiotic. These are rare and unpredictable reactions that occur due to genetic factors influencing how a person metabolizes or responds to a drug. They are not related to the drug's dose or pharmacological action. For instance, some individuals might develop a severe reaction to a standard dose of a drug due to their unique genetic makeup. When two or more drugs are used simultaneously, they can interact in ways that alter their effectiveness or increase the risk of adverse effects. Drug interactions can be either pharmacokinetic (affecting how drugs are absorbed, distributed, metabolized, or excreted) or pharmacodynamic (affecting the drug's effects on the body). For instance, combining warfarin with certain antibiotics can increase bleeding risk. These are secondary, often undesirable effects that occur alongside the intended therapeutic effects of a drug. Side effects can range from mild discomfort, such as drowsiness from antihistamines, to more severe issues like liver damage from certain medications. The chemical nature of a drug can contribute to reactions. Drugs that affect multiple body systems or have narrow therapeutic indices (the range between effective and toxic doses) are more likely to cause adverse reactions. Individual characteristics such as age, sex, genetic predisposition, and overall health can influence how a drug is metabolized and its potential for causing reactions. For example, elderly patients may experience increased sensitivity to certain medications due to age-related changes in drug metabolism. High doses or prolonged use of a drug can increase the risk of adverse reactions. For instance, long-term use of corticosteroids can lead to osteoporosis and other complications. Combining drugs can alter their effects and increase the risk of adverse reactions. It's crucial to review all medications a patient is taking to prevent potentially harmful interactions. Patients should be informed about potential side effects and advised to report any unusual symptoms. Understanding what to expect can help in early identification and management of drug reactions. Regular monitoring of patients, especially when starting a new medication or changing doses, can help detect adverse reactions early. This includes monitoring for known side effects and conducting necessary laboratory tests. Healthcare providers should regularly review all medications a patient is taking to avoid interactions and ensure appropriateness. This includes considering over-the-counter drugs, supplements, and herbal remedies. Advances in pharmacogenomics allow for more personalized approaches to prescribing medications based on individual genetic profiles.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author states there is no conflict of interest.

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Corresponding authors Chuen Khin, Department of Pharmacology, University of Humber, Canada, E-mail: chuenkhin86@gmail.com

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