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Treatment strategy in depression. II. MAO inhibitors in depression resistant to cyclic antidepressants: two controlled crossover studies with tranylcypromine versus L-5-hydroxytryptophan and nomifensine.

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Abstract

Antidepressants are ineffective in about 30% of the patients with major depression. Besides electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) and lithium, MAO inhibitors have been suggested as an alternative in such patients. In 2 controlled, partial crossover studies involving 47 patients with major depression who had already been treated unsuccessfully with at least 2 cyclic antidepressants, the effect of the MAO inhibitor tranylcypromine was studied. The first study was an open comparison with L-5-hydroxytryptophan (L-5HTP), the second study a double-blind comparison with nomifensine. Neither the patients treated with L-5HTP nor the patients treated with nomifensine, except one, improved. In contrast, tranylcypromine was effective in 50% of the patients. The depressions of the responders to tranylcypromine appeared to be more endogenous (according Newcastle Scale II) and of shorter duration than those of the non-responders. It is concluded that MAO inhibitors such as tranylcypromine are an effective alternative to ECT and lithium in patients with major depression who have failed to respond to cyclic antidepressants.

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