

PFCA

Wellness Update

PRINCETON FAMILY CARE ASSOCIATES, LLC

FALL 2023



Message from Dr. Fernandez

Fall arrives once again, and we prepare for the upcoming holiday season.

I certainly have appreciated seeing many of our patients return to the office, allowing us to attend to your clinical care with face-to-face assessments and recording your vital signs to ensure your ongoing well-being more thoroughly.

In this issue of the PFCA Newsletter, we bring you some administrative

items to consider as well as some articles on current and pertinent topics.

Please stay well, as we approach Winter. I encourage all, especially seniors, to stay current on all your vaccines, including the new COVID booster, the Flu and the new RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus) vaccines.

With Regards,

Dr. Fernandez

Zurzuva

For Post Partum Depression

By Marisa Fernandez,
Psychiatric Technician

The approval of Zurzuva is a major breakthrough for PDD; Zurzuva is only the second drug to be approved by the FDA for PPD, and the first oral medication approved for the indication. The oral route of administration makes it much more convenient for patients, compared to intravenous drug for PPD, Zulresso (brexanolone). Zurzuva is also unique in that it has a rapid onset of action, with reduction of depressive symptoms seen as early as three days after starting the medication. Additionally, Zurzuva is an acute therapy administered for just two weeks, which may be particularly attractive to patients who want to avoid maintenance therapy or are concerned about medication in breast milk.

Despite the FDA approval, Zurzuva will undergo a scheduling review before it can enter the market, as the FDA noted that the medication has potential for abuse. Additionally, the FDA rejected Zurzuva for the treatment of Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), meaning additional clinical trials will be required to confirm the efficacy of Zurzuva for MDD. Sage Therapeutics and Biogen expect Zurzuva to be commercially available this Fall. The clinicians are PFCA will be watching for updates on this exciting new medication, and its potential use at our practice.

FDA Approves First Oral Treatment for PPD. (2023, August 4). FDA News Release: <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-approves-first-oral-treatment-postpartum-depression>

Breathing Exercises

By Marisa Fernandez,
Psychiatric Technician

Research over the past few decades suggests that breath work, the practice of correcting and controlling your breathing through simple exercises, can improve health and wellbeing. Breathing at rest is typically slow and steady, between 12 and 20 breaths per minute, but consciously slowing your breath even further, between 5 and 7 breaths per minutes, can help reduce blood pressure, regulate your heart rate, lift your mood, reduce chronic pain, and increase energy levels.

So how does something as simple as breath work improve your overall physical and mental health? When we are sick or anxious, our breathing becomes rapid and from the top of the chest, which activates the body's sympathetic nervous system. Activation of the sympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for the body's "flight or fight" response, raises one's heart rate, suppresses digestion, and

heightens the brain's tendency to detect danger (whether real or imagined). By slowing down our breathing, we activate the parasympathetic system, which is responsible for the body's "rest and digest" response.

A recent study found that simply focusing on breathing, when paired with mindfulness practices, was as effective as drugs to treat anxiety disorders. If you are interested in trying breath work for yourself, pulmonologists, sleep doctors, and researchers recommend the following three simple breathing exercises.

4-4-8 Breathing

- Inhale for 4 counts
- Hold for 4 counts
- Exhale for 8 counts
- Repeat

Several studies suggest that extending your exhale to last longer than your inhale (which naturally occurs during exercise)

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Breathing Exercises

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can quickly slow your heart rate and bring blood pressure down.

Alternate Nostril Breathing

- Close your right nostril and breath in through your left nostril for 4 counts
- Close your left nostril and breathe out from your right nostril for 4 counts
- Repeat

Studies have suggested that the right nostril is connected to the sympathetic system, while the left nostril is connected to the parasympathetic

system. Consciously switching between nostrils helps balance the two systems and bring focus and calm.

Box Breathing

- Inhale for 4 counts
- Hold for 4 counts
- Exhale for 4 counts
- Hold for 4 counts
- Repeat

This is a technique used by U.S. Navy SEALs. By forcing your breathing into a steady rhythm, you are more alert and energized.

Medication Shortages

According to the FDA, medication shortages are becoming a common occurrence and recently we have observed the impact within our practice. Shortages occur for a variety of reasons: Supply chain disruptions, a surge in orders that manufacturers had not anticipated, or a total discontinuation of production of a medication.

Regardless of the reason, the shortages create challenges for patients as they try to fill their medication orders. If this happens, patients can ask their pharmacist when the medication will become available. If the pharmacy is unable to determine availability, patients can ask if another pharmacy in their chain may have a supply on hand. If this fails, patients can reach out to other local pharmacies directly to inquire about availability.

Contacting pharmacies can be a challenge when they are understaffed, and they may not be able to locate supplies at other pharmacies within their company. Although our staff can try to help you find the resources to fill your prescriptions, please understand that we are also hampered by being on the same phone queue waiting to speak to the pharmacy staff.

Returning to the Office

We have enjoyed seeing many of our patients return to in-person appointments throughout the summer. We are trying to make your experience enjoyable when you do come in, from the welcoming greeting by our reception staff, the serenity of the waiting room experience, the return of our beverage station, to the display of local artists throughout our office.

If you have not come in-person yet, we look forward to seeing you soon. Please understand the request for in-person visits at least annually is clinically driven and is a vital component of Dr. Fernandez's best practices for treatment.

Cold & Flu Seasons Ahead

As we move into Fall and before you know it Winter, we will be indoors more and at risk for sharing viruses. Remember the basic health and hygiene practices we learned from COVID: Handwashing frequently, staying up-to-date with vaccines, improve ventilation to help prevent virus particles from accumulating in indoor air, getting tested if you have COVID symptoms, following recommendations if you have been exposed, and avoiding contact with people who have suspected or confirmed COVID. Preventative measures include wearing masks and increasing space and distance between others. Dr. Fernandez also encourages all to keep up with COVID and Flu vaccinations.

Pharmacy Discount Programs

Pharmacy discount programs, like GoodRx and SingleCare, offer discount coupons for generic medications. When pharmacy benefits do not adequately cover non-preferred generics even after the medication has been Prior Approved, researching pharmacy discount programs has made these medications more affordable for some of our patients. This may require using more than one pharmacy to fill your medication orders and registering with a specific pharmacy program. Use your favorite internet search tool to start your research.

Tips for Back-to-School

*By Marisa Fernandez,
Psychiatric Technician*

The transition from vacation to education mindset can be difficult for both parents and their children. Dr. Howard Liu, adult, child, and adolescent psychologist, offers some essential mental health tips to manage any back-to-school stress.

Firstly, spending regular, one-on-one time with family to "foster essential conversations about mental and emotional wellbeing." Similarly, studies show that having a regular family meal to be associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety. Secondly, Dr. Liu recommends having proactive conversations about bullying to educate children on what they can do, and how to be an ally. Thirdly, he highlights the importance of a reliable routine, particularly a reliable sleep routine, prior to the start of school. Lastly, quality exercise is an important tool for children to manage anxiety and depression.

Additionally, Dr. Liu points out things to avoid such as over-scheduling too many extracurricular activities, and isolation from friends outside of school. As a rule of thumb, if it takes your student more than half an hour to fall asleep or they wake more than a couple times at night, with difficulty falling back to sleep, they may be experiencing some type of stress. For more information, click this link.

<https://www.today.com/parents/teens/back-to-school-mental-help-tips-rcna98627>

The 2024 Annual Election Period (AEP) for Medicare Part D begins October 15, 2023 & ends December 7, 2023

Use this time to shop for the best pharmacy plan with a list of your current medications.