Parkinson’s Medication and Behavioural Change
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The purpose of this leaflet is to inform people with Parkinson’s, relatives and health care professionals of a particular rare side effect associated with some treatments for Parkinson’s disease.

The brain is very complex with numerous systems interconnecting. Consequently, a treatment exerting positive effects on one aspect of brain functioning may have a negative effect on another brain region.

Dopamine is the key chemical messenger implicated in Parkinson’s disease. In addition to its role in regulation of movement, dopamine is known to play a role in brain systems involved in the reward, reinforcement and learning of behaviours.

Several scientific studies have reported an association between certain treatments for Parkinson’s and compulsive behavioural disorders (in patients with Parkinson’s Disease). These compulsive disorders are thought to be very rare side effects of dopaminergic medications. Studies suggest these side effects of treatment occur in between 4-8% of patients taking these medications. It is thought that most of the treatments for Parkinson’s can cause these side effect, but it is primarily the class of drugs known as dopamine agonists (for example, Ropinirole (Requip) and Pramipexole (Mirapexin) and Rotigotine (Neupro)), which have been shown to cause altered behaviour. These side effects are usually not seen in patients who are taking only levodopa-based drugs (such as Sinemet/Co-Careldopa and Madopar/Co-Beneldopa).

The most common behavioural changes documented to date are:

- Gambling (including online gambling using the internet). Very significant amounts of money have been lost.
- Excessive interest in sexual matters and thoughts, including looking at pornography on the internet.
- Compulsive shopping, which may result in significant debt.
- Over eating.
Often, such behaviours will only occur on a high dose of the particular drug, but this is not always the case. In our experience when the “offending” medication has been reduced or stopped these behavioural side effects have stopped. If the medication concerned needs to be reduced or stopped other Parkinson’s drugs may be able to be added to a person’s medication regimen in order to prevent a worsening of movement and other Parkinson’s symptoms.

**What can be done to help?**

It is important that if a person experiences any of the above alterations in their behaviour that they report this to a healthcare professional, preferably their GP, hospital doctor for Parkinson’s or Parkinson’s nurse as soon as possible so that they can talk about the problem and the options for managing the problem can be discussed. People with Parkinson’s should not stop their Parkinson’s medications without first discussing this with their Doctor.

Health care professionals involved can offer advice and support and more expert help can be sought from the various specialist organisations listed below. These behaviours can be extremely distressing not just for the person with PD but also their spouse/partner, other family members and close friends.

All of these behaviours are considered to be rare. This leaflet should therefore be a source of information to make you aware of these rare behavioural changes. The vast majority of people on treatments for their Parkinson’s will not experience such side effects of the medication.

**Sources of help:**

- Your GP.
- Your Parkinson’s nurse specialist.
- Your hospital specialist/Consultant for PD.

The Doctor/Nurse or any person who has experienced any of these side effects can report this to the UK’s regulatory body so that the incidence of such side effects can be monitored. This notification is called yellow card reporting. Address: Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, CMH Freepost, London, SW8 5RR.
References and Further Information

The Parkinson’s Disease Society
Helpline: 0808 800 0303.
Email: enquiries@parkinsons.org.uk
Website: www.parkinsons.org.uk [accessed August 2007]
The Parkinson’s Society has produced information sheets on compulsive behaviours, hypersexuality and gambling.

GamCare
Tel: 0845 6000 133 (local rate) 08.00 - 24.00
2-3 Baden Place, Crosby Row, London, SE1 1YW
Email: help@gamcare.org.uk
Website: www.gamcare.org.uk [accessed August 2007]
This service offers information, advice and counselling for people affected by a gambling dependency.

Gamblers Anonymous
Tel: 08700 508880
PO Box 88, London, SW10 03U.
Website: www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk
The Doctor/Nurse or any person who has experienced any of these side effects can report this to the UK’s medicine regulatory body so that the incidence of such side effects [accessed August 2007]
Helpline for people who are compulsive gamblers; also run selfhelp groups and separate meetings for spouses, friends/families who are affected by gambling.

The British Association for Sexual and Marital Therapy
PO Box 13686, London, SW20 9ZH.
Website: www.basrt.org.uk [accessed August 2007]

Avon Counselling and Psychotherapy Service
Tel: Bristol 930 4447

Consumer Credit Counselling Services
Tel: 0800 1381111
Offer free impartial advice to people with debt problems via telephone counsellors.


NHS Constitution. Information on your rights and responsibilities. Available at www.nhs.uk/aboutnhs/constitution