How are we prescribing Psychotropic Drugs in Portugal?

ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON OF PSYCHOTROPIC DRUGS PRESCRIPTION AT A NATIONAL LEVEL

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KEY-WORDS

PSYCHOTROPIC DRUGS | PORTUGUESE PRESCRIBING PROFILE | BENZODIAZEPINES | BI-CSP

BACKGROUND

Portuguese data from 2016 indicate a consumption of 12 971 342 packages of anxiolytic drugs and 11 795 898 of antidepressants in a country with 10 166 580 inhabitants. Although there might be international differences in the prescribing profiles of these drugs, the risks of polypharmacy and misuse are global.

RESULTS

Psychotropic drugs occupy an important position in our drug prescription - **antidepressants and anxiolytics** are the **second and third most prescribed pharmacological classes**, with alprazolam occupying the 10th place of all drug prescriptions.

In 2017, the Portuguese National Health Service website provided the “Primary Health Care ID platform” (BI-CSP), an instrument for clinical and health governance. Using this tool, we collected data on the prescription of drugs in Portugal in 2017 and 2018.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In **Primary Health Care**, **anxiolytic drugs** are the most prescribed of all psychotropic drug classes; this differs from **Psychiatry** statistics, which point for **antidepressants** as the most prescribed pharmacological class.

Nevertheless, **between 2017 and 2018**, there has been a **slight decrease in the Portuguese prescription of anxiolytics**, where benzodiazepines are included - from 12.7 M to 12.6 M prescribed anxiolytic packages.

[more charts available by scanning the QR code]

We have also noticed that psychotropic prescription has greater expression in **female gender**.

Comparing public and private health sectors, there are **more psychotropic drugs being prescribed in the private one**, with observable differences in the most prescribed substances.

DISCUSSION

It is important to note that the numbers reported refer to the **packages that were prescribed** and not to those that were actually purchased.

Still, **Portugal is known to be one of the European countries with the highest consumption of antidepressants and anxiolytics**. Particular attention might be needed to consumption in the private health sector and by female patients. Easy access to these drugs and self-medication may be underlying causes, but the **scarcity or the lack of awareness for therapeutic alternatives** is also worrying - it

would be important to **integrate a greater number of psychologists into patient care**, especially at primary health care units, and to **promote and demystify psychiatric support** when needed - these could be useful strategies to further reduce Portuguese benzodiazepine consumption.

CONCLUSIONS

The current information system allows us to be conscious of our prescribing profile in order to aim for the proposed goals. In this analysis, we've verified that the Portuguese prescription seems to be moving towards the targets set for 2020 in our Mental Health Program though there is still much to be improved in the mental health care provided.

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