



Extended Research Article

Effectiveness of Escitalopram and Nortriptyline on Depressive Symptoms in Parkinson's disease: the ADepT-PD RCT pilot

Anette Schrag,^{1*} Camille Carroll,² Glyn Lewis,³ Marc Serfaty,³
Gordon Duncan,⁴ Sophie Molloy,⁵ John Whipps,⁶ Blair McLennan,⁷
Jing Yi (Jessica) Weng,⁸ Rachael M Hunter,⁸ Caroline S Clarke,⁸
Nicholas Freemantle⁷ and Andrew Embleton-Thirsk⁷

¹Department of Clinical and Movement Neurosciences, London, UK

²Translational and Clinical Research Institute, Faculty of Medical Sciences, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

³Division of Psychiatry, University College London, London, UK

⁴NHS Lothian, Edinburgh, UK

⁵Department of Neurosciences, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, London, UK

⁶PPI Representative, UK

⁷Comprehensive Clinical Trials Unit, University College London, London, UK

⁸Research Department of Primary Care and Population Health, University College London, London, UK

*Corresponding author a.schrag@ucl.ac.uk

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Plain language summary

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What was the question?

The ADepT-PD trial was designed to assess the effects of two different types of antidepressants for depressive symptoms in Parkinson's which work on different chemicals in the brain. They are commonly used in the National Health Service, but it is unclear how effective they are in people with Parkinson's.

What did we do?

This trial attempted to compare nortriptyline, a drug from the class of tricyclics, and escitalopram, a drug from the class of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, with identical-looking tablets that did not contain any of the drug (a placebo) to find out if they reduce these symptoms more than placebo and to compare their effects.

What did we find?

We were able to include only a small number of patients with depression in Parkinson's willing and able to participate in a randomised placebo-controlled trial with antidepressants. The main reason was that most people who have these symptoms are now already offered antidepressants already available in the National Health Service. This made it difficult to conduct a trial with these medications despite several strategies including the trial being run using video-assessments during the coronavirus disease pandemic. In this pilot study, we found that patients treated with either of the two medications or with placebo improved their scores. However, there was no difference between the groups in the main outcome measure. Nevertheless, the number of participants was not large enough to draw any conclusions from this, and the study did not progress to the full trial.

What does this mean?

Depression is a common feature of Parkinson's and once recognised it is now frequently recognised and commonly treated with antidepressants. Trials examining response to antidepressants for depression in Parkinson's compared to placebo and between different available antidepressants are therefore challenging. The information gathered on challenges in conducting large trials in Parkinson's in the United Kingdom, including those using remote assessments, is already helping design of other United Kingdom-wide trials in Parkinson's.

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This article

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