

## The Painful Side of Pain Medications

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*Publisher's Note:* This month's report of findings is not just for you, the doctor, but also your patients, family and loved ones. Please share it with everyone you care about (click above to access printable version).

Every drug has side effects – *every* drug. The vast majority of these side effects are unknown until long after the drug is released for use by the public. Many times, it can take more than a decade for adequate research to reveal the extensive dangers inherent in the drugs approved by the FDA and prescribed by medical doctors.

A good example is the drug pregabalin (brand name: Lyrica), classified as a gabapentinoid-type drug and sold by Pfizer, Inc. Lyrica received its first [FDA approval](#) for neuropathic pain on Dec, 31, 2004. It gained a second FDA approval for treating fibromyalgia on June 22, 2007, with two additional FDA approvals in 2012 and 2017.<sup>1</sup>

The Potential Dangers: Some You Hear About ... Some You Don't

The television commercials for Lyrica present what appear to be patient testimonies of "chronic widespread pain" caused by fibromyalgia which is "thought to be caused by overactive nerves." The voiceover continues to state that "Lyrica is believed to calm these nerves." Almost half of the one-minute [commercial](#) warns consumers about the potential side effects, which include "serious allergic reactions, suicidal thoughts or actions," depression and much more.<sup>2</sup>

The list of side effects is a bit longer and more detailed on various health websites, starting with the usual non-threatening list that includes "drowsiness, dizziness, dry mouth, constipation, difficulty concentrating, swollen arms/legs, and weight gain." [WebMD suggests](#) the more serious ones are "rare" and are only experienced by "a small number of people."<sup>3</sup>

But [new research](#) published in the prestigious *British Medical Journal* (BMJ) provides a disturbingly clear understanding of what happens to people who take Lyrica and gabapentin, the two main gabapentinoids.<sup>4</sup> Investigators reviewed the experiences of 191,973 people from 2006-2013. Here is what they found:

- 5.2% were treated for suicidal thoughts or actually died from suicide (9,983 people)
- 8.9% experienced an unintentional overdose (17,086 people)
- 6.3% were in a traffic accident or got a traffic ticket (12,094 people)
- 4.1% were arrested for a violent crime (7,871 people)
- 36.7% saw their doctor for head or body injuries (70,454 people)

Taking these drugs increased consumers' risk of the above serious side effects by as much as 26 percent overall. Perhaps the most frightening aspect of these findings is the way the drugs seem to change people's behaviors. Based on the above, someone who takes these kinds of painkillers could become suicidal, violent, engage in criminal behavior, be prone to injuries, overdoses and traffic accidents ... or any combination of the above.

## Why Are MDs Still Prescribing Lyrica?

So, why are medical doctors still prescribing Lyrica to patients with pain? There are potentially two answers. The first is that relieving fibromyalgia pain can be elusive. As the TV commercials reveal, fibromyalgia is "thought to be caused by overactive nerves." Lyrica and other gabapentinoids may be the non-opioid pain drugs the average MD believes will be effective.

The second answer is more insidious. Since Aug. 1, 2013, consumers have been able to examine the amount of money paid by drug companies to their medical doctors courtesy of online databases established by the Physicians Payments Sunshine Act, which was part of the Affordable Care Act of 2010. Most believe that prior to the 2013 date, the amount of payments made by drug companies to medical doctors was substantially larger.\*

A look at one of these [online databases](#) reveals that between then and the end of 2016, Pfizer, Inc., the makers of Lyrica, paid \$175 million to 193,305 medical physicians, which included 527,574 payments totaling \$9.43 million for Lyrica alone.<sup>5</sup> This may also explain the prescribing habits for a drug with the above potential side effects.

### Knowledge Is Power – Take Charge!

The most frightening reality in our current health care climate (which is true of all drugs) is that the majority of people taking these medications, or who will be prescribed these medications in the future, *have no knowledge of the research revealing the risks.*

The results of the above *BMJ* study were published on June 12, 2019, but I don't think the media is likely to ever report on it sufficiently ... not if they want to keep those TV commercials running.

To protect yourself and your family, you should always choose a safe, nondrug approach to pain relief that includes chiropractic, related modalities, proper nutrition and exercise / physical rehabilitation. If someone you know is taking drugs, prescription or otherwise, to manage his or her health, encourage to take the time to look at the research.

While it can be challenging to read research, you can review the applicable abstracts / summaries of all drugs by searching on "side effects for [drug name]" at the PubMed.gov website (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed>), which is provided free by the National Institutes of Health.

\*See how much your own medical doctor receives from drug manufacturers at <https://www.propublica.org/>.

### References

1. Lyrica Approval History. Drugs.com.
2. Lyrica TV Commercial, 'Most People'. iSpot.tv.
3. Lyrica Side Effects. WebMD.com.
4. Molero Y, Larsson H, D'Onofrio BM, et al. Associations between gabapentinoids and suicidal behaviour, unintentional overdoses, injuries, road traffic incidents, and violent crime: population based cohort study in Sweden. *BMJ*, 2019;365:l2147.
5. "Dollars for Docs: How Industry Dollars Reach Your Doctors." Data for Pfizer, Inc. ProPublica Inc.

OCTOBER 2019