WEAVE SPRINT . PAPER IV

Psychopharmacology II: emergencies, resistance, monitoring and interactions

The second psychopharmacology chapter, read from the bedside, not the receptor: the two drug emergencies and the neuromuscular sign that separates them, resistance once staged rather than asserted, the augmentation ladder and where ketamine and clozapine enter it, the levels worth measuring and the sampling discipline behind them, pharmacovigilance and the pharmacogenomic loci now in use, the interaction map on its enzymatic and non-enzymatic axes, prescribing when liver, kidney, heart, brain, pregnancy or age changes the answer, all six neurostimulation modalities in full, and the severe cutaneous reactions an allele predicts.

CONTENTS

- Drug emergencies
- Treatment resistance and augmentation
- Drug monitoring, pharmacovigilance and pharmacogenomics
- Interactions and prescribing in physical illness
- Neurostimulation and device-based treatments
- Pharmacogenetic and structural drug-reaction syndromes
- Consolidate and apply

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PAPER IV

Psychopharmacology II: emergencies, resistance, monitoring and interactions

Six bands . one complete notes document

Drug emergencies

1 · Psychopharmacology II for the psychiatrist: what this chapter owns, and what it points to

A psychotropic that was correct for the diagnosis can still be the wrong drug for the patient in front of you. The agent that suits a depressive episode meets a patient who is already taking several other medicines, whose kidneys clear the drug more slowly than any textbook assumed, whose inherited enzyme complement handles it at an unusual speed, who has already had adequate trials fail, or who returns with rigidity and fever that the prescription itself produced. In none of these has the pharmacology of the molecule changed. What has changed is that a second variable now sits between the drug and the patient, and every decision has to be made through it.

That is the whole subject of these notes. The systematic pharmacology that precedes them studies the drug class as an object in its own right: what it binds, what binding there produces, how the body handles the molecule, and what separates the members of a class from one another. This chapter takes those same molecules and asks what happens when something else is in the room. The marks here are not given for reciting a mechanism. They are given for a decision made under a named constraint, and the constraint is written into the question. Which concentration do you measure, and at what point in the dosing interval. Which agent do you avoid in this organ. Which test do you order before this prescription is written. What do you do when adequate treatment has already failed. What is this new sign, and did you cause it.

1.1 The lens: pharmacology under a second variable

What this chapter studies is the psychopharmacology of the complicated case, and its unit of teaching is the decision rather than the drug. The organising idea is **the second variable**: anything present alongside the psychotropic that changes what the correct action is. Five of them recur, and between them they account for almost every question this territory can ask. Another drug, which competes for the same clearing enzyme or adds its own effect at the same receptor. Another organ, when a heart, a liver, a kidney or a brain with an established disease alters either the exposure the patient achieves or the harm that exposure can do. Another genome, when inherited variation alters either pharmacokinetic exposure or immune susceptibility to a specific reaction. A failed trial, when adequate treatment has been given and the illness has not moved. And a syndrome the drug itself produced, when the presenting problem is no longer the disorder but the treatment.

Each of these turns a settled pharmacological fact into an unsettled clinical question. A half-life that is a property of a molecule becomes a question about this patient's clearance. A therapeutic

range that is a property of an assay becomes a question about when the sample was drawn. A familiar adverse effect becomes a question of attribution. Reading the whole chapter through that lens keeps its very different sections coherent, because the emergencies, the resistance decisions, the monitoring framework, the interaction matrix, the device-based treatments and the idiosyncratic reactions are all the same operation performed on different second variables.

RULE **No decision in this territory is made about the drug alone.** Before answering any question here, name the second variable the question has put in front of you, and say what it changes: the exposure the patient actually achieves, the harm that exposure can do in this particular organ, the susceptibility to a reaction the dose does not predict, the interpretation of a measured value, or the attribution of a new sign. A correct pharmacological statement about the molecule that ignores the second variable answers a question nobody asked.

1.2 Four operations, performed again and again

Beneath the sections lie four operations, and a reader who recognises which one a question is asking for has usually found the answer's shape before finding its content. The first is **anticipation**: predicting, before a drug is given, what a co-prescription, an organ, a genome or a pregnancy will do to it, and adjusting the choice rather than the aftermath. The second is measurement: deciding when a clinical judgement should be replaced by a number, which number, and at what moment in the dosing cycle it means anything at all. The third is **attribution**: deciding whether a new sign belongs to the illness, to a co-morbidity or to the prescription, which is the single judgement on which the management of every drug emergency in this chapter turns. The fourth is escalation: deciding what comes next when what should have worked has not, whether that is another drug, a second drug alongside the first, or a modality that is not a drug at all.

Anticipate	Measure	Attribute	Escalate
BEFORE THE PRESCRIPTION	WHEN A NUMBER BEATS A JUDGEMENT	ILLNESS OR TREATMENT	WHEN ADEQUATE TREATMENT FAILS

The operations are ordered, and the order is doing work. Anticipation is cheapest and is performed with a history and a prescription chart. Measurement is what anticipation escalates to when the variation is too large to reason about. Attribution is forced on you at the bedside, usually urgently, and is easiest for the clinician who anticipated. Escalation is the decision that follows when the first three have been done properly and the illness has still not yielded, which is precisely why a resistance judgement is only as good as the exposure and adherence work that preceded it.

1.3 The principle is taught elsewhere; the application is taught here

The first boundary this chapter keeps is with the pharmacology that precedes it. Half-life and steady state as concepts, the cytochrome system as a substrate map, the therapeutic index as a principle, and the comparison of one member of a class against another all belong to the Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes, which teach them as properties of molecules and classes. Those notes then forward five bodies of material here by name: the target concentrations themselves, interactions that cross class boundaries, prescribing in physical illness

and across the lifespan, monitoring that spans classes, and the emergencies psychotropics produce.

The practical form of the boundary is simple. A principle is named here and moved past; an application is taught here in full. That a drug is cleared by a particular enzyme system is a principle. That adding a second agent which inhibits that system to a patient already stable on the first is an interaction with a predictable direction, a predictable time course and a defined action is an application, and applications are what this chapter is made of. The same test settles most uncertainty about where a piece of prescribing knowledge belongs: if the sentence would be true with only one drug and one healthy patient, it belongs to the class pharmacology; if it needs a second variable to be true at all, it belongs here.

TRAP **Answering a second-variable question with the class pharmacology.** Asked how to prescribe an antidepressant to a patient with established liver disease, or what to do when a mood stabiliser and a newly added analgesic meet, candidates reproduce the receptor profile and the adverse-effect signature of the class. The pharmacology may be flawless and still earn very little, because the examiner named the second variable in the stem and is marking what you did about it. State the mechanism in a clause, then spend the answer on the decision the constraint forces.

1.4 What this chapter hands over

The remaining boundaries are handovers, and each is worth rehearsing as a sentence because naming them accurately is faster and better rewarded than reconstructing a neighbouring chapter's material from memory.

- The **emergency act** is not taught here. The emergency-department presentation of a patient who is acutely unwell, the resuscitation and critical-care escalation, and the decision about where the patient is then looked after belong to the Perinatal/women's mental health and emergency psychiatry notes. This chapter owns the pharmacological lens on the same syndromes: which agents and combinations precipitate them, the mechanism by which they do, the named criteria as constructs an examiner can ask you to reproduce in your own words, the differentiation of one from another, and the drug decisions that follow.
- The **procedural act** is not taught here either. For every device-based treatment, the procedural technique is set out in the ECT and neurostimulation notes, along with the consent and legal frame and the requirements a service has to meet before it can offer the treatment at all. This chapter teaches the modality itself and its utility across disorders, at the depth a standalone answer on any single modality demands.
- Guideline-level algorithms for the treatment of a named disorder are also not this chapter's business. Where a resistance decision sits inside a disorder's own treatment sequence, the sequence belongs to the notes on that disorder, and what is taught here is the pharmacological reasoning underneath it.

Notice what the handovers have in common. In each case the neighbouring chapter owns what is done to the patient, and this chapter owns the drug reasoning that explains and follows it. That

division is not a filing convention. It is the reason an answer here should read as pharmacology rather than as emergency medicine or as a procedure list.

1.5 The map of the territory

Six territories follow, and they are arranged so that each supplies something the next assumes. The table states what each territory is for; the sections themselves supply the depth, the numbers and the attributions.

TERRITORY	THE SECOND VARIABLE IT WORKS ON	THE DECISION IT TEACHES
The drug emergencies	A syndrome the prescription itself produced	Which agents and combinations precipitate each syndrome, how to tell them apart as exam constructs, and what to stop, start and continue
Treatment resistance and augmentation	An adequate trial that has failed	What counts as resistance before the label is applied, and how switching, combining and augmenting differ as pharmacological strategies in depression and in schizophrenia
Monitoring, pharmacovigilance and pharmacogenomics	Variation you cannot see from the bedside	Which agents earn a measured concentration and when the sample is taken, how an adverse reaction becomes a recognised signal, and which inherited variation is worth testing for before prescribing
Interactions and prescribing in physical illness and across the lifespan	Another drug, another organ, another life stage	How psychotropics interact by kinetics and by pharmacodynamics, and how the choice changes in cardiac, hepatic, renal and neurological disease, in pregnancy and lactation, in the elderly and in children
Neurostimulation and device-based treatment	Illness requiring urgent definitive treatment or not responding to drugs; the entry point depends on the modality	What each modality is, how it is thought to work, which disorders it is used in and how strong the evidence is in each
Severe idiosyncratic drug reactions	An immune response nobody could predict from the dose	Which reactions are recognised, which drugs carry them, and where a pre-prescription test changes the choice of agent

Read the map in both directions. Given a patient with a complication, it says which territory holds the decision. Given a question in an examination, it says which second variable the examiner has introduced and therefore which body of reasoning is being tested. Monitoring recurs across several territories because a measured concentration, an interval on the

electrocardiogram, a blood count and a pre-prescription test are the same operation on different variables.

IN INDIA

Three of the decisions in this chapter turn on the patient rather than on the drug, and all three are worth making a routine habit at the point of prescribing rather than after a problem has appeared. Ask whether ancestry changes the pre-prescription test before certain anticonvulsants are started, and take the answer from the section on immunogenetic testing, which names the allele, the drugs and the population it applies to. Ask whether an inherited metaboliser phenotype changes the starting dose before any response has been observed, and take that from the pharmacogenomics section. And ask which agents in the prescription earn a measured concentration, and at what point relative to the dose the sample is drawn, from the therapeutic drug monitoring section. Each of the three is a question asked before the prescription is written, not a test ordered after the patient has come to harm.

1.6 Treating the prescription as a differential diagnosis

The habit this chapter is really trying to install is the habit of suspecting the treatment. A patient on psychotropic medication who develops a new physical or neurological sign has at least three candidate explanations: the psychiatric illness, an unrelated medical problem, and the prescription. Only the third is under the prescriber's direct control, and only the third can be tested by an action as simple as stopping a drug. Yet it is routinely considered last, partly because the drug has been given for weeks without trouble, partly because the patient is expected to be unwell, and partly because the medication chart is read as a record of what has been done rather than as a list of suspects.

Making the prescription a standing item on the differential changes several things at once. It brings the drug history forward from the end of the assessment to the beginning, where it is capable of altering what you do next. It makes recent changes matter more than long-standing ones, since a stable regimen is a weaker suspect than a dose increased, an agent added, or a drug stopped in the days preceding the presentation.

PITFALL

Reviewing the medication chart last. The commonest way a drug-related presentation is missed is not ignorance of the syndrome but sequence: the history, the examination and the investigations are worked through, and the prescription is checked only when nothing else has explained the picture. By then a dose has often been given again, and the account of what changed and when has been reconstructed rather than recorded. Read the chart first, note every change made in the preceding period and every agent added by another team, and ask what the combination in front of you does that neither drug does alone.

1.7 What a good answer in this territory looks like

Questions here are set as constrained problems, and they reward a recognisable shape of answer. Open by naming the second variable and saying what it changes, because that single sentence tells the examiner the question has been understood. Then give the mechanism briefly, in the

service of the decision rather than as a display. Then give the decision itself with its conditions attached, since almost nothing in this chapter is true unconditionally: a concentration means something at a stated point in the dosing interval and in a stated phase of treatment, a dose adjustment belongs to a stated degree of organ impairment, and a test belongs to a stated drug in a stated population. Finally, say what you would hand over and to whom, which demonstrates the judgement the whole chapter is built on.

GOOD TO REMEMBER

Before adding any drug to an existing psychotropic regimen, ask four questions out loud. Does the new agent share a clearing route with anything already prescribed. Does it add to an effect the existing regimen already produces, whether on the heart, the central nervous system or the same transmitter. Does the patient have an organ or a life stage that changes the exposure either drug achieves. And is there anything about this combination that should be measured rather than watched. A prescriber who answers those four before signing has performed the anticipation this chapter exists to teach, and has usually avoided the presentation the later sections are about.

1.8 A scaffold to carry into essays and vivas

Under examination pressure the method has to survive the loss of the detail. The spine that holds this chapter together is SECOND, which is a teaching scaffold rather than a validated instrument, and it will structure an answer on any topic in these notes: an emergency, a resistant illness, a measured level, an interaction, a device-based treatment or a rash.

MNEMONIC

SECOND

Second variable: name it first, whether it is another drug, an organ, a genome, a failed trial or the prescription itself. **E**xposure: ask whether the concentration in this patient is what the dose implies, and whether it can be measured. **C**ause: decide whether the new sign belongs to the illness or to the treatment before treating either. **O**ptions: when adequate treatment has failed, set out switching, combining, augmenting and the device-based modalities as alternatives with different profiles. **N**arrow margins: identify what this particular combination threatens and monitor that, rather than monitoring by habit. **D**evolve: hand the emergency act and the procedural conduct to the chapters that own them, and say so explicitly.

For a short answer, compress the scaffold to the second variable, the mechanism, the decision and the handover. For a long essay, expand each letter and draw the specifics from the section that owns them. In a viva, make the reasoning audible: say what else is on board, what that does to the exposure or to the risk, what you would therefore do differently, and at what point you would ask for help. That is the clinician the examination is looking for, and it is also the clinician who is safe with a combination no textbook has yet described.

Ask what else is present besides the drug, then say what that changes about the exposure, the interpretation, the attribution or the next step.

2 · Serotonin syndrome: precipitants, Hunter criteria, features and management

This is the emergency a prescription writes by itself. Every other syndrome in this section arrives with the illness; this one arrives with the drug chart. The drug history establishes serotonergic exposure; diagnosis then requires a compatible clinical syndrome, preferably assessed with the Hunter decision rule, and the exclusion of important mimics. The marks are correspondingly pharmacological: which agents and which combinations produce it, what the receptor account is and how firmly it may be stated, how the named criteria are constructed and what they are actually asking, and what the drug response is once the syndrome is recognised. The emergency-department presentation, the resuscitation and critical-care escalation and the disposition decision belong to the Perinatal/women's mental health and emergency psychiatry notes and are not taken up here; the comparison against neuroleptic malignant syndrome has its own section of these notes.

2.1 Why the drug chart is read first

Two properties of **serotonin toxicity** set it apart from the idiosyncratic drug reactions taught elsewhere in these notes, and both are pharmacological rather than clinical. The first is that it does not require polypharmacy. The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines state that the syndrome can occur with a single serotonergic drug at a therapeutic dose, and more frequently with a combination of serotonergic drugs or in overdose, which means a single agent at a therapeutic dose leaves the diagnosis open. A candidate who reasons that the patient is on one antidepressant, at a licensed dose, and therefore cannot have serotonin toxicity has made the error the sentence exists to prevent.

The second is the time course. Symptoms can develop within minutes of ingestion, although most patients present within **six to 24 hours** after a medication change or overdose. That window is a useful temporal clue that must be interpreted with exposure and examination findings: it ties the presentation to a specific prescribing event rather than to the course of the illness being treated, and it tells you which page of the chart to read. An agitated, tremulous, sweating patient whose regimen changed the previous evening is a pharmacological problem until proven otherwise.

MNEMONIC

Exposure, Branch, Grade, Withdraw

The four steps in order: establish that a serotonergic agent was actually taken, find one complete qualifying criterion branch, grade the severity, and stop the offending drugs. Each step is a separate examinable construct and the sequence is not interchangeable, because the criteria set below is only licensed to run once the first step is satisfied.

2.2 The precipitants, and the routes in

The first route is additive pharmacodynamics, and one pairing dominates it. The Maudsley guidelines state that most severe cases involve an MAOI, including moclobemide, plus an SSRI. The detail that carries the mark is the parenthesis: **moclobemide** is named inside the

monoamine oxidase inhibitor group rather than outside it, so a candidate who treats it as a safer member of the class and pairs it with a reuptake inhibitor has walked into the exact combination the source singles out.

Next come selected non-psychiatric precipitants, which are not a separate mechanism at all. They are a prescriber and indication grouping, and the agents in it act through the same additive pharmacodynamics, by reuptake inhibition, monoamine oxidase inhibition or serotonin release. The American Family Physician review of serotonin syndrome tabulates the medications that may contribute, and separates an antidepressant and mood-stabiliser class from a Miscellaneous class of five entries:

- Cocaine
- Dextromethorphan
- **Linezolid**
- L-tryptophan
- 5-hydroxytryptophan

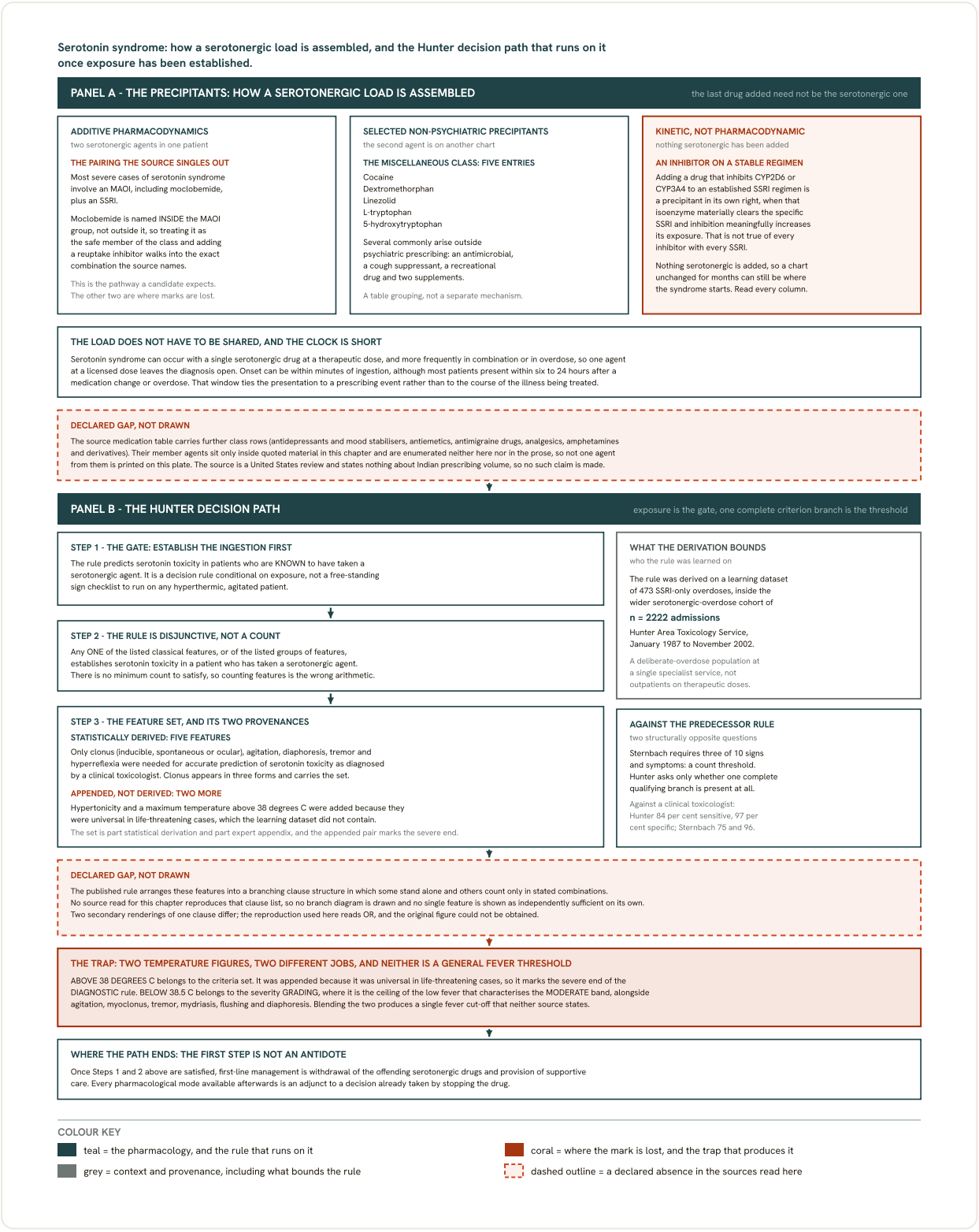


Fig 37.1 Serotonin syndrome: how a serotonergic load is assembled, and the Hunter decision path that runs on it. A single agent at a therapeutic dose leaves the diagnosis open, and most patients present within six to 24 hours of a medication change or overdose. Most severe cases involve an MAOI, including moclobemide, plus an SSRI. Selected non-psychiatric precipitants are a prescriber and indication grouping, not a separate mechanism; only the Miscellaneous class of five is enumerated. The kinetic pathway adds nothing serotonergic: a CYP2D6 or CYP3A4 inhibitor on an established SSRI regimen raises exposure to the drug already on the chart, where that isoenzyme materially clears that SSRI and inhibition meaningfully raises it. The Hunter rule runs only once ingestion is established and is disjunctive, one complete criterion branch being sufficient; it was derived on a learning dataset of 473 SSRI-only overdoses within a cohort of 2222 admissions. The branching clause list and the unenumerated class rows are declared, not drawn. (Ables and Nagubilli, American Family Physician 2010; Dunkley and colleagues, QJM 2003; the Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines in Psychiatry.)

Read that list for what it implies about where the second drug comes from. Several entries commonly arise outside psychiatric prescribing, so the complete medication and supplement history must be reviewed: an antimicrobial and a cough suppressant sit alongside a recreational drug and two over-the-counter supplements. The serotonergic contribution that completes the picture is frequently written on another team's chart, or on no chart at all.

A further route is kinetic rather than pharmacodynamic, and it is the one this chapter exists to teach. The same review names the addition of drugs that inhibit the CYP2D6 or CYP3A4 isoenzymes to an established selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor regimen as a precipitant in its own right, when that isoenzyme materially contributes to clearance of the specific SSRI and inhibition meaningfully increases its exposure. Nothing serotonergic has been added; the exposure to the existing antidepressant has simply risen. The enzyme map itself, and the systematic cross-class interaction matrix built on it, are developed in their own sections of these notes, as is the genotype that decides how much inhibition a given patient could absorb before the interaction mattered. What belongs here is the narrower point: inhibition of an isoenzyme that materially clears the antidepressant already on the chart can itself be the precipitant, so the last drug added is not necessarily the serotonergic one, and the underlying principles of enzyme kinetics and steady state belong to the Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes.

GOOD TO REMEMBER

When the picture fits and the antidepressant has been unchanged for months, do not stop at the psychotropic column. Ask what was started in the last week for anything at all, including by another department, and ask specifically whether it inhibits either of the two isoenzymes named above. A drug chart read only for serotonergic agents will miss a possible pharmacokinetic route into this syndrome.

2.3 The receptor account, and how firmly to state it

An Indian case series of mild serotonin syndrome puts the mechanism in a single sentence: it is suggested that excess stimulation of brainstem and spinal cord 5-HT1A and 5-HT2A receptors causes the syndrome. Two things about that sentence are examinable. The first is its content, which is a receptor account and not an anatomical prediction: what is proposed is excess stimulation of those two receptor subtypes, and no more than that. The named locus belongs to the proposal itself; it is not a map from which the shape of the clinical presentation can be predicted.

The second is its strength. The source writes that it is suggested, not that it is established, and it offers this as a proposal rather than as a finding of its own series. An answer that hardens the suggestion into the mechanism has said more than the literature does, and in a viva the correct move is to give the account and then name it as proposed. Receptor pharmacology at the level of subtype selectivity and the adverse-effect signature it generates is the province of the Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes; what this chapter owns is the toxic state that excess agonism produces when two prescriptions meet.

2.4 The Hunter criteria as an exam construct

The **Hunter Serotonin Toxicity Criteria** are examined more often for their structure than for their content, and the structure has two properties that a candidate must state explicitly. The first is a prerequisite: the rule runs only where recent serotonergic ingestion is already established. It is a decision rule conditional on exposure, not a free-standing sign checklist that can be applied to any hyperthermic, agitated patient. The second is that it is disjunctive. Any one of the listed classical features, or of the listed groups of features, establishes serotonin toxicity in a patient who has taken a serotonergic agent, and there is no minimum count to satisfy.

RULE **Exposure is the gate, and one complete criterion branch is the threshold.** Establish the serotonergic ingestion first, because the criteria are not licensed without it. Then a single complete qualifying branch is sufficient, and a branch may be one feature or a stated combination of features rather than a feature on its own. A candidate who counts features and reports that the patient has only two has applied the wrong arithmetic to the right rule.

The content came out of a statistical derivation. Only five clinical features were needed for accurate prediction of serotonin toxicity as diagnosed by a clinical toxicologist: **clonus** in its inducible, spontaneous and ocular forms, agitation, **diaphoresis**, tremor and **hyperreflexia**. Clonus is the load-bearing sign of the set, appearing in three separate forms, and it is a particularly important examination finding that appears in several branches of the published rule.

Two further features were appended rather than derived. **Hypertonicity** and a maximum temperature **above 38 degrees C** were added to the criteria because they were universal in life-threatening cases. Such patients lay outside the learning dataset. That provenance is worth carrying into an answer: the rule is part statistical and part expert appendix, and the appended pair is precisely the pair that marks the severe end. The published rule arranges these features into a branching structure in which some stand alone and others count only in stated combinations; the branch list is not reproduced here, and a candidate should not assume that every one of the five features is independently sufficient on its own.

2.5 Hunter against Sternbach, and what the derivation bounds

The predecessor rule is the comparison an examiner reaches for. The **Sternbach criteria** are a count threshold, requiring **three out of a possible 10** signs and symptoms, so the two rules are structurally opposite: one asks how many features are present, the other asks whether any qualifying feature is present at all. Against a clinical toxicologist's diagnosis the newer rule performed better on both axes at once, which is unusual, and Hunter is generally preferred because it was simpler and performed modestly better in the derivation study.

84%	97%	75%	96%
HUNTER SENSITIVITY	HUNTER SPECIFICITY	STERNBACH SENSITIVITY	STERNBACH SPECIFICITY

Where the rule came from bounds what it can be asked to do. It came out of a single toxicology service's serotonergic-overdose admissions, 2222 admissions to the Hunter Area Toxicology Service between January 1987 and November 2002, and the rule itself was derived on a learning

dataset of 473 SSRI-only overdoses inside that cohort rather than on the whole of it. Two limits follow. The population was one of deliberate overdose rather than of outpatients taking therapeutic doses, and the setting was a single specialist service rather than a general clinical population. Neither limit invalidates the rule, and both are the honest caveat to attach when a stem describes a patient who is not in either category, such as an outpatient on a stable regimen who has just been given an antimicrobial.

2.6 Grading the severity, and the two temperature figures

Severity is graded in three bands, and the grading matters pharmacologically because the treatment decision is taken against the band rather than against the criteria. The Maudsley guidelines place insomnia, anxiety, nausea, diarrhoea, hypertension, tachycardia and hyperreflexia in the mild band; agitation, myoclonus, tremor, mydriasis, flushing, diaphoresis and low fever below 38.5 C in the moderate band; and severe hyperthermia, confusion, rigidity, respiratory failure, coma and death in the severe band. Read down the three bands and the autonomic and neuromuscular features recur, more marked at each step: increasing severity is associated with more marked autonomic and neuromuscular abnormalities, including hyperthermia and rigidity. The bands describe what predominates at each level of severity, not one finding turning into another, and the features may coexist.

TRAP **Treating the two temperature figures as one threshold.** They come from different sources and do different jobs. The figure appended to the criteria set marks the temperature that was universal in life-threatening cases, so it belongs to the diagnostic rule at the severe end. The figure inside the severity grading is the ceiling of the low fever that characterises the moderate band. A candidate who blends them produces a single fever cut-off that neither source states, and then applies it to whichever question is asked.

2.7 Management, and why withdrawal is the whole of the first step

The treatment target by phase is straightforward to state and easy to under-weight in an answer. The American Family Physician review puts two things first and nothing before them: withdrawal of the offending serotonergic agents, together with supportive care. Every pharmacological mode available afterwards is an adjunct to a decision that has already been taken by stopping the drug, and the examinable point is that no antidote question arises until the offending agent is off the chart. Where the syndrome is severe, the setting of care, the resuscitation and the escalation decision belong to the Perinatal/women's mental health and emergency psychiatry notes, and this chapter stops at the prescription.

How long that first step takes, and whether it is enough by itself, is answered differently by the two sources. The American Family Physician review states that mild cases generally resolve within **24 to 72 hours** with conservative therapy and removal of the causative drugs, and the qualifier in that sentence is generally, not always. An Indian case series of mild serotonin syndrome found withdrawal alone insufficient in most cases: in most of its patients, withdrawal of the offending agents alone produced no or minimal response and cyproheptadine was then required. That does not contradict the broader American Family Physician formulation, which is withdrawal together with conservative therapy rather than withdrawal on its own, and the two

statements are printed here side by side without averaging. The split of that series between the patients who responded to withdrawal alone and those who did not is not available here and is deliberately not stated.

PITFALL

Reassuring a patient or a referring team that a mild case will settle on its own within a stated number of hours. The Western figure is qualified as a general expectation and the one Indian series in this material found withdrawal alone insufficient in most of its patients. Withdraw the drug, then review the patient against the clock rather than discharging against it.

2.8 Cyproheptadine: one drug, four published regimens, four populations

The specific agent is **cyproheptadine**, and the honest opening line about it is the one the American Family Physician review supplies: it is widely used, but there is no definitive evidence of its effectiveness in serotonin syndrome. That is not a reason to omit it from an answer, but it fixes the register. This is an adjunct with a plausible receptor rationale and weak evidence, given after the offending drug has been stopped, and an answer that presents it as the antidote of choice has overstated the literature.

For an Indian candidate the guideline figure comes first. The Indian Psychiatric Society clinical practice guideline gives **cyproheptadine 8 to 12 mg/day orally in severe serotonin syndrome**, and the same guideline's management instruction for the syndrome opens with stopping the offending drugs. The Western schedule is then named as the alternative rather than as the standard. Set the published figures side by side with the population each belongs to.

SOURCE	POPULATION THE FIGURE WAS PUBLISHED FOR	CYPROHEPTADINE AS PUBLISHED
Indian Psychiatric Society clinical practice guideline	Severe serotonin syndrome	8 to 12 mg/day orally in severe serotonin syndrome
Indian case series of mild serotonin syndrome	Mild serotonin syndrome, outpatients	8 mg three times daily, that is 24 mg/day, in mild serotonin syndrome, recorded as the amount these patients received and carried here as case-series evidence rather than as a dose the series recommends
American Family Physician review	Moderate to severe serotonin syndrome	In moderate to severe serotonin syndrome an initial 12 mg should be considered, then an additional 2 mg every two hours if symptoms continue; after the patient is stabilised 8 mg every six hours may be administered as the maintenance dosage
Indian product label for the marketed tablet	Licensed antihistaminic and antiserotonin use, the indication recorded on the label; the label carries no serotonin-syndrome indication of its own	For that labelled antihistaminic and antiserotonin indication, and for no other, the adult total daily dose is not to exceed 0.5 mg/kg/day, with a therapeutic range of 4 to 20 mg a day and the majority of patients requiring 12 to 16 mg a day. This is the marketed product's own labelled ceiling, not a serotonin-syndrome dose

Two features of that table are load-bearing. The first is the modals, which are permissive throughout the Western schedule: a loading dose should be considered and a maintenance dose may be administered, neither of which is an instruction. The second is that the product label is a label. It binds the dose of the marketed tablet and carries no serotonin-syndrome indication, so it is not the governing authority for an emergency regimen even though it is the only Indian document that states a weight-based ceiling.

A third feature is what these documents do not contain, and it is worth naming because a printed dose with nothing said above it reads like a complete instruction. The Indian Psychiatric Society entry gives a daily amount of cyproheptadine for severe cases and names neither a dose to begin with nor a ceiling above it. The American Family Physician cyproheptadine schedule states a loading dose, a titration step and a maintenance dose and then stops, so no maximum for the day appears anywhere in it. The cyproheptadine product label runs the other way: it states a range and a weight-based cap and no starting dose at all, which is what a document written to constrain a dose rather than to begin one looks like. Where a source is silent about an upper limit, that silence is the record, and this chapter does not fill it from elsewhere.

TRAP **Reading the four regimens as an ascending dose ladder.** Sorted by milligrams alone, the mildest illness appears to receive the most drug and the severe Indian figure appears to be an under-dose. That ordering is an artefact of crossing four populations, not a disagreement about severity. Each figure is only interpretable with its population attached, and an answer that lines them up as a titration schedule has manufactured a claim none of the four sources makes.

IN INDIA

Print the Indian Psychiatric Society figure first and treat the Western loading schedule as the named alternative. The marketed tablet's prescribing information does state a weight-based adult daily cap, but it states it for the licensed antihistaminic and antiserotonin indication and carries no serotonin-syndrome indication at all, so it is contextual product information rather than the ceiling that governs an emergency regimen, and dosing that runs up against it is a question for toxicology advice rather than for the label. The two documents disagree about the maximum a day may contain, and this chapter holds only the ceiling and the therapeutic range from the label, not the label's stated exceptional maximum, so the disagreement is named rather than quantified on both sides.

Exposure plus one complete qualifying criterion branch makes the diagnosis; stopping the offending drug is the treatment, and every agent given afterwards is an adjunct with its population attached.

3 · Neuroleptic malignant syndrome: features, pathophysiology and management

Neuroleptic malignant syndrome is a prescribing event before it is a critical-care event. The pharmacology question asks four things of you: which drug produced it, by what mechanism, which named criteria set the examiner has in mind, and what happens to the drug chart afterwards. The emergency-department presentation, the resuscitation and the disposition decision are taught in the Perinatal/women's mental health and emergency psychiatry notes and are deliberately left there. What follows is the drug's half of the problem, which is the half a psychiatrist owns on the ward round and the half the written paper asks about.

3.1 The prescription that produces it

The drug history is most of the diagnosis. DSM-5-TR records that affected individuals have generally met a **dopamine antagonist** within 72 hours of symptoms developing, and it takes care to present this as descriptive text rather than as a diagnostic criterion. That distinction is worth holding: read as a criterion it becomes a false reassurance whenever the exposure is older or less certain, and read as a description it simply tells you where to look first.

The offending agent is not always on the psychiatric chart. The AIIMS text Clinical Methods in Psychiatry states that the syndrome is seen more with high-potency antipsychotics and names metoclopramide and domperidone among the other offending agents. Central dopamine D2 antagonists can precipitate the syndrome whatever specialty prescribed them, and abrupt withdrawal or reduction of dopaminergic therapy is the other established route; in a rigid febrile patient the antiemetic chart is part of the drug history.

The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines gather the risk factors into one undifferentiated row. Separating out its drug-related items is worth doing, because they describe the prescription rather than the patient:

- high-potency first-generation antipsychotics
- a recent or rapid dose increase
- a rapid dose reduction
- abrupt withdrawal of a co-prescribed anticholinergic agent
- **antipsychotic polypharmacy**

RULE **Dose change in either direction is a risk, not dose escalation alone.** The same list carries rapid increase and rapid reduction, which is hard to reconcile with a simple dose-toxicity model. These are associations the guideline reports rather than a mechanism it explains: a patient stable for years can present during a cross-taper, and withdrawal of an anticholinergic, a drug doing nothing dopaminergic, earns a place on the risk list without any account of why.

3.2 Two hypotheses, and the two drugs that follow from them

The central account begins where dopamine does thermoregulatory work. Tse and colleagues locate that role in the thermoregulatory centre of the hypothalamus, and particularly in the **anterior pre-optic nucleus**, which gives the hyperthermia a mechanism rather than leaving it as an association. The motor sign supplies a second clue. DSM-5-TR describes generalised rigidity, **lead-pipe** in its most severe form and usually unresponsive to antiparkinsonian agents. That unresponsiveness is the teaching point: this is not ordinary drug-induced parkinsonism scaled up, and an anticholinergic given in that belief costs time.

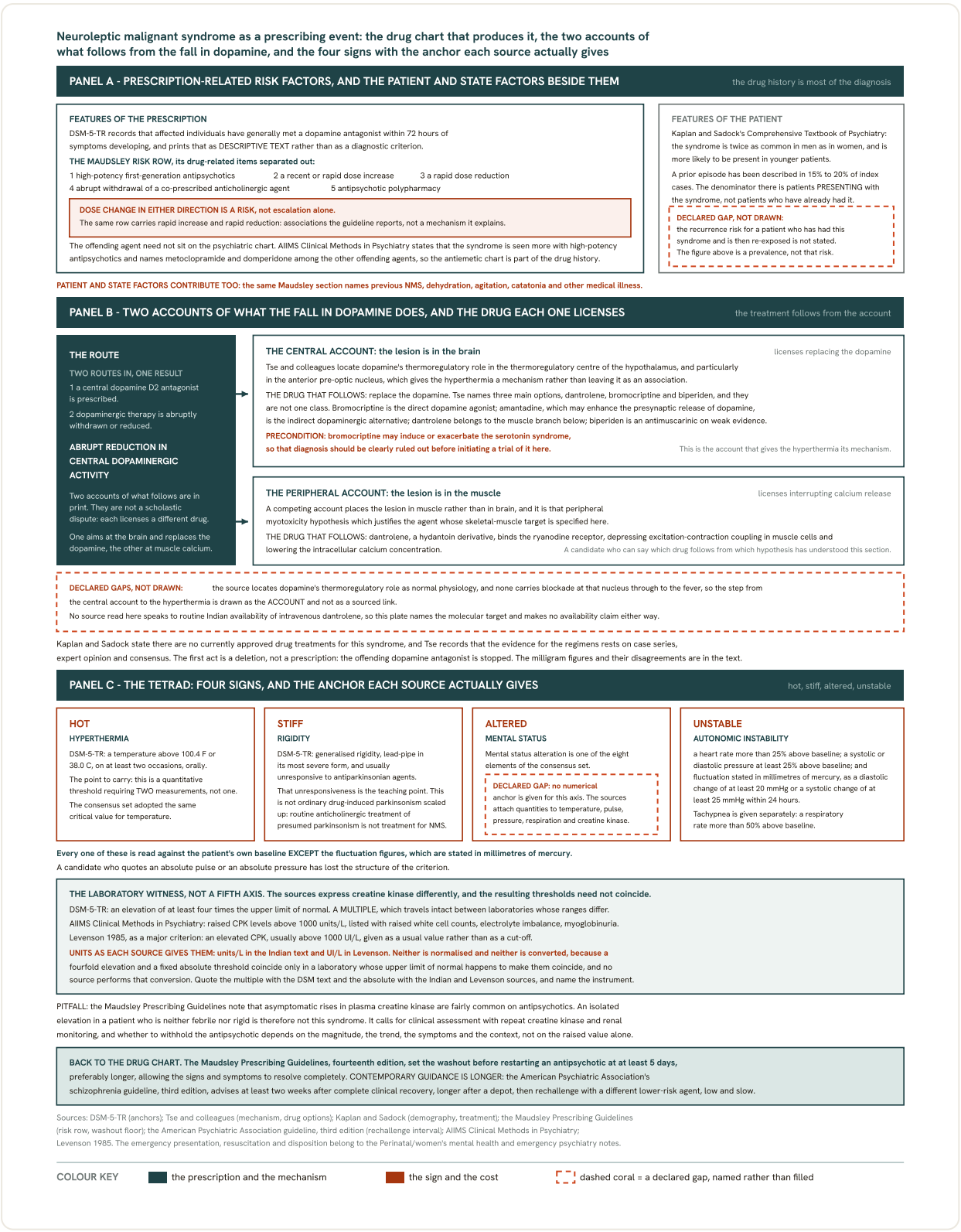


Fig 37.2 Neuroleptic malignant syndrome: the prescription, the two accounts, and the tetrad. Prescription-related risk factors: high-potency first-generation antipsychotics, a rapid dose change in either direction, abrupt withdrawal of a co-prescribed anticholinergic and antipsychotic polypharmacy, with patient and state factors beside them; the dopamine antagonist is generally met within 72 hours. Central dopaminergic activity falls by either route, an antagonist prescribed or dopaminergic therapy withdrawn, and each account licenses a different drug: the anterior pre-optic nucleus licenses replacing the dopamine, the myotoxicity account licenses dantrolene at the ryanodine receptor. The two creatine kinase forms need not pick out the same number: at least four times the upper limit of normal in DSM-5-TR, above 1000 units/L in the Indian text, above 1000 UI/L in Levenson. (DSM-5-TR; Tse; Kaplan and Sadock; Maudsley; AIIMS Clinical Methods; Levenson 1985.)

A competing account places the lesion in muscle rather than in brain, and it is that peripheral myotoxicity hypothesis which justifies the agent whose skeletal-muscle target is specified here. Dantrolene is a hydantoin derivative that binds the **ryanodine receptor**, depressing excitation-contraction coupling in muscle cells and lowering the intracellular calcium concentration. The two hypotheses are not a scholastic dispute, because each licenses a different drug: the central account licenses replacing dopamine, the peripheral account licenses interrupting calcium release. A candidate who can say which drug follows from which hypothesis has understood this section, and the accompanying figure carries the same route from receptor blockade to bedside sign.

3.3 Tempo: when it appears, and when it settles

Onset is early and its spread is wide. DSM-5-TR gives onset varying from hours to days after the drug is started, with some cases inside 24 hours, most in the first week and virtually all within 30 days. Recovery has a comparable shape once the drug is withdrawn: mean recovery time runs 7 to 10 days, most patients recovering within 1 week and nearly all within 30 days, the same outer bound the onset window carries.

Exposure before onset differs by drug class, though the difference is softer than the figures look. In a review of spontaneously reported cases, median exposure before onset was 23 days for cases associated with atypical antipsychotics against 6 days for typical-associated cases. Two qualifications travel with those medians and neither may be dropped. They come from a spontaneous-reporting database rather than a cohort, so they describe what was reported rather than what occurred; and the same analysis found considerable overlap between the groups, because a large share of the atypical-associated cases were taking more than one antipsychotic, frequently including a typical agent, with the reverse holding for the typical-associated cases. A clean between-class contrast is not what these data support.

3.4 How often, and in whom

Incidence depends entirely on how the cases were counted. Database studies give 0.01% to 0.02% among patients treated with antipsychotics, of the order of one case in five to ten thousand; a population-based study from Hong Kong found a higher incidence risk, and drug-safety programme data covering 1993 to 2015, reported in the Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines, give a higher figure again. These are not three competing estimates of one quantity. They are three surveillance methods, and the spread between them is the honest answer to how common the syndrome is.

0.11%	0.16%	15% to 20%	10% to 20%
HONG KONG POPULATION STUDY	DRUG-SAFETY PROGRAMME DATA	PRIOR EPISODE, INDEX CASES	FATALITY IF UNRECOGNISED

Kaplan and Sadock's Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry adds the demographic skew: the syndrome is twice as common in men as in women and is more likely to be present in younger patients. The mortality figure is worth little without its scope attached. DSM-5-TR puts fatality at 10% to 20% where the disorder is not recognised, which is a statement about missed diagnosis

rather than a case-fatality rate for the syndrome as a whole. Other fatality figures are in print from different eras and different case definitions; they belong to their own populations and must never be pooled into a single range.

TRAP **Reading the prior-episode figure as a recurrence risk.** A prior episode has been described in 15% to 20% of index cases, and the denominator there is patients presenting with the syndrome, not patients who have already had it. It answers how often a presenting case has a history, and says nothing about the chance that a survivor will relapse on re-exposure. That second number is the one a rechallenge conversation actually needs, and this chapter does not hold it.

3.5 The criteria sets as an exam construct

Three named sets circulate and they are built differently, which is more examinable than any single threshold. DSM-5-TR prints no counted checklist; it describes the syndrome and attaches quantitative anchors to individual features. The International Expert Consensus criteria, derived by a Delphi panel, form a counted and weighted set of **eight elements**: one drug element, recent dopamine antagonist exposure or dopamine agonist withdrawal; two cardinal signs, hyperthermia and rigidity; one cognitive element, mental status alteration; one laboratory element, creatine kinase elevation; two autonomic elements, being **sympathetic nervous system lability** and tachycardia with tachypnea counted together; and one exclusion element, a negative work-up for other causes. Levenson's 1985 criteria are older and simpler, a major-and-minor structure satisfied by all three major criteria, or two major with four minor.

CRITERIA SET	HOW DRUG EXPOSURE ENTERS	STRUCTURE	WHERE THE POSITIVE CALL IS SET
DSM-5-TR	Dopamine antagonist met within 72 hours of onset, written as descriptive text	Narrative description, with anchors attached to single features	No count and no score; judgement on the whole picture
International Expert Consensus (Delphi)	One of the eight elements, and it admits dopamine agonist withdrawal as well as antagonist exposure	Eight elements, weighted against one another by the panel	Best agreement where the total reaches 74, against modified DSM-IV-TR criteria
Levenson 1985	Absent; no drug-exposure element among either tier	Three major criteria and six minor criteria	All three major, or two major with four minor

The anchors DSM-5-TR attaches to individual features are the ones most often asked for. Hyperthermia is defined as a temperature **above 100.4 F or 38.0 C on at least two occasions, measured orally**, with profuse diaphoresis as its distinguishing companion. The autonomic criteria are partly relative and partly absolute, which is easy to garble: a heart rate more than 25% above baseline, a systolic or diastolic pressure at least 25% above baseline, but fluctuation stated in millimetres of mercury, as a diastolic change of at least 20 mmHg or a systolic change of at least 25 mmHg within 24 hours. Tachypnea is given separately, as a respiratory rate more than 50% above baseline. Every one of these is read against the patient's own baseline except the

fluctuation figures, so a candidate who quotes an absolute pulse or pressure has lost the structure of the criterion. The consensus panel's own critical values match the temperature, creatine kinase and blood-pressure-elevation anchors given here; whether it took the pulse, respiratory and fluctuation figures across as well is not verified and is not claimed.

Two further points repay attention. Levenson's set names no drug-exposure element at all, among either its major or its minor criteria, while both later sets do, so a stem offering a florid picture with no drug history is separating the sets rather than testing the syndrome. And the consensus criteria carry their own operating characteristics, sensitivity 69.6% against specificity 90.7%. Those figures must not be ranked against the decision rule taught for the serotonin syndrome in the neighbouring section: that instrument was validated in a different disease against a different reference standard, in overdose admissions rather than in archived consultations. The panel also weighted its eight elements against one another, but those per-element priority weights are not reported in the account read here and are not reconstructed from memory; the validated total is available, the weights behind it are not.

MNEMONIC

Hot, Stiff, Altered, Unstable

The four axes every set is built on: hyperthermia, rigidity, altered mental status and autonomic instability, with the creatine kinase as the laboratory witness rather than a fifth axis. They share the core clinical syndrome but differ both in the elements included and in how those elements are combined or weighted.

3.6 The creatine kinase, where the sources genuinely disagree

The sharpest disagreement in this topic is about the form of the threshold, and the two forms need not pick out the same number. DSM-5-TR sets the threshold as a multiple, an elevation of **at least four times the upper limit of normal**, which travels intact between laboratories whose reference ranges differ. The AIIMS text Clinical Methods in Psychiatry gives an absolute figure instead, raised CPK levels above 1000 units/L, listed alongside raised white cell counts, electrolyte imbalance and myoglobinuria; Levenson's major criterion is expressed the same way, an elevated CPK usually above 1000 UI/L. Both forms are in print. They are different instruments, and whether they pick out the same number depends on the laboratory's upper limit of normal; Levenson's figure is given as a usual value rather than a cut-off, and neither form is a correction of the other.

TRAP **Converting the multiple into the absolute, or the absolute into the multiple.** A fourfold elevation and a fixed absolute threshold coincide only in a laboratory whose upper limit of normal happens to make them coincide, and no source performs that conversion. Quote the multiple with the DSM text and the absolute with the Indian and Levenson sources, and say which instrument you are using. An Indian examiner is the more likely to have the absolute form in mind, which is a reason to carry both rather than a reason to substitute one.

PITFALL

Treating a raised creatine kinase as the diagnosis. The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines note that asymptomatic rises in plasma creatine kinase are fairly common on antipsychotics. An isolated elevation in a patient who is neither febrile nor rigid is therefore not this syndrome. It requires clinical assessment with repeat creatine kinase and renal monitoring, and whether to withhold the antipsychotic depends on severity and context rather than on the raised value alone. The elevation is a supporting feature inside a clinical picture rather than a trigger standing alone.

3.7 Pharmacological management, and the rechallenge decision

Start from the honest position. Kaplan and Sadock's Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry states that there are no currently approved drug treatments for this syndrome, and Tse and colleagues record that the evidence supporting the different regimens rests on case series and expert opinion and consensus. Everything that follows is therefore off-label and weakly evidenced, which is precisely why the first act is a deletion rather than a prescription: the offending dopamine antagonist is stopped, and no specific agent substitutes for that. Tse names the three main drug options as **dantrolene**, **bromocriptine** and **biperiden**.

Dantrolene follows the peripheral hypothesis. For severe NMS, Kaplan and Sadock state that dantrolene may be effective, and begin with intravenous **0.8 to 2.5 mg/kg every 6 hours**, with a maximum of 10 mg/kg daily in the textbook's own words; the permissive modal is the source's own and should survive into your answer. Tse's review states the dantrolene dose in NMS differently, as intravenous 1 to 10 mg/kg body weight with no dosing interval attached, or an oral option, 50 to 600 mg once daily. These two statements do not reconcile into a single regimen and are better quoted with their sources than blended. Note also where each of them stops. The textbook's dantrolene schedule carries its own daily cap. The review's dantrolene figure states an amount and a route with no ceiling above them, so the cap printed beside the first regimen belongs to that regimen and does not travel across to the second. Neither dantrolene passage gives a separate initiation dose either: in both, the dose stated is the dose given.

Bromocriptine follows the central hypothesis, and here the same textbook contradicts itself. For NMS one chapter starts bromocriptine at 2.5 mg two or three times daily, with 45 mg as the maximum total daily dose, while another chapter of the same book carries a second, inconsistent bromocriptine regimen, added after dantrolene. That second regimen's figures are not quoted in the source behind this sentence and are not printed here; the examinable point is the contradiction itself, not the rival numbers. An independent review supports the titration form, so learn the titration and treat the disagreement as internal to the textbook rather than as a second consensus. **Amantadine**, which may enhance the presynaptic release of dopamine, is the alternative dopaminergic agent in NMS at 200 to 400 mg/day in divided doses. The passage states that range and stops there, with no initiation dose below it and no maximum above it, so the upper figure is the top of a stated range and not a stated limit.

RULE **Exclude the serotonin syndrome before giving bromocriptine.** Kaplan and Sadock state that bromocriptine may induce or exacerbate serotonin syndrome, so that diagnosis should be clearly ruled out before initiating a trial of it here. This is the clinical pay-off of the differentiation taught in the neighbouring section: the two syndromes are separated not for tidiness but because a treatment for this one worsens the other.

IN INDIA

Two decisions here are specifically Indian. First, because the AIIMS text names metoclopramide and domperidone among the offending agents and both are prescribed well outside psychiatry, the drug history in a rigid febrile patient must reach past the psychotropic chart to the antiemetics and prokinetics before any antipsychotic is exonerated or any single agent is blamed. Second, the Indian Psychiatric Society schizophrenia guideline names bromocriptine to be considered in case of NMS, inside the catatonia row of its special-conditions table, alongside intensive care admission if the clinical condition worsens and the observation that electroconvulsive therapy may be required. The table names bromocriptine for NMS but gives no NMS recommendation either for or against dantrolene, and that silence is not a recommendation against the drug. The escalation and disposition the row points at belong to the Perinatal/women's mental health and emergency psychiatry notes.

What the drug history tells you afterwards is the last piece, and it is the piece the psychopharmacology paper is most likely to ask. The fourteenth edition of the Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines sets the washout before restarting an antipsychotic at **at least 5 days, preferably longer**, allowing time for the signs and symptoms to resolve completely before **rechallenge**. Read the direction of that instruction carefully: it is a floor with an open ceiling, not a scheduled restart, and five days is not a rule that can be carried on its own. Contemporary guidance is longer. The American Psychiatric Association's schizophrenia practice guideline, third edition, advises waiting at least two weeks after complete clinical recovery, longer again where the exposure was to a depot, and then rechallenging with a different lower-risk agent at low dose and slow titration. Quote the Maudsley figure as the fourteenth edition's wording and take the two-week interval as the clinical rule.

GOOD TO REMEMBER

Two questions belong in every antipsychotic drug history and both come out of this topic. Has this patient ever had an episode of this syndrome, and how fast was the last dose change in either direction? The first is asked because a prior episode is common enough among presenting cases to be worth hunting for; the second because speed of change, up or down, sits on the risk list beside the drug itself. Neither question needs a laboratory, and both are usually answerable before the first blood sample is drawn.

Stop the dopamine antagonist first, then decide which hypothesis you are treating: dantrolene for the muscle, bromocriptine or amantadine for the dopamine, and do not give bromocriptine until the serotonin syndrome has been excluded.

4 · Serotonin syndrome versus NMS: comparative differentiation

The comparison is the question. A patient on psychotropic medication becomes febrile, altered in mental state and abnormally stiff, and two named syndromes sit on the list. Neither is excluded by how unwell the patient looks. An answer that recites the features of one syndrome and then the features of the other has not answered anything, because the examiner has not asked what each syndrome is; the examiner has asked which one this is. The marks are carried by the axes on which the two genuinely separate, by the order in which those axes are interrogated, and by an honest statement of where the separation runs out. Each syndrome is taught as an entity in its own right elsewhere in these notes. What follows is the discrimination itself, read from the pharmacology rather than from the resuscitation.

The boundary is worth fixing before anything else. The emergency-department presentation, the resuscitative and critical-care escalation and the disposition decision belong to the Perinatal/women's mental health and emergency psychiatry notes. The material here is the drug that produced the syndrome, the examination that separates the two, the criteria question as an examination construct, and what the label commits the prescriber to once it is applied.

4.1 Why this differential is not academic

The usual reason a comparison is examined is that the two entities are confusable. Here there is a second and better reason. A review of the two syndromes in Current Neuropharmacology states that there is no role for dantrolene, biperiden or bromocriptine in the therapeutic management of serotonin syndrome, and, in the same breath, no role for **cyproheptadine** in neuroleptic malignant syndrome. The syndrome-directed agents named do not cross over. Read what that does and does not say. Withdrawal of the offending drug, supportive care and the sedation of agitation are common ground, so the label does not decide the whole of management. What it decides is the syndrome-directed drug that follows, and that is enough to convert a taxonomic question into a prescribing one, because the agent chosen on the strength of the label has nothing to offer the other diagnosis if the label is wrong.

RULE **The discrimination is made from the drug chart and the neuromuscular examination, in that order.** Whatever the two presentations have in common cannot separate them, however severe it looks, so the answer is never built on how unwell the patient is. What separates them is the pharmacological class the patient was exposed to, the interval between that exposure and the illness, and the direction in which the neuromuscular system has moved. These three are the principal discriminators. Other findings may support the distinction, but none of them is individually definitive, and nothing the two presentations hold in common can do the separating at all.

Note what this rule does not claim. It does not say that the shared features are unimportant, only that a feature both syndromes produce cannot be the thing that tells them apart, and it does not promise that the three discriminating axes will always be available. In a patient brought in unaccompanied with no drug history, the class axis and the tempo axis are unreadable and only the examination remains, and the answer must say so rather than manufacture a certainty the bedside does not supply.

4.2 The prescription: the discriminator that comes first

StatPearls sets the drug-class discriminator out cleanly: serotonin syndrome is precipitated only by **agents that impact the serotonergic system**, while neuroleptic malignant syndrome is precipitated by **dopamine receptor antagonists**. The source glosses that second half as the antipsychotics, and taken as a definition the gloss is too narrow in two directions at once. The international consensus work on the syndrome, by Gurrera and colleagues, defines the lesion rather than the drug: a marked reduction in central dopaminergic activity, usually D2 antagonism but also the abrupt withdrawal or reduction of dopaminergic treatment. Read both halves as statements about a mechanism rather than as lists of drugs. Each syndrome is tied to a pharmacological action, not to a therapeutic category and not to a drug name, so the question at the bedside is never whether the patient is on an antidepressant or an antipsychotic by label. It is what the agents on the chart do to the two transmitter systems.

That distinction has consequences the examiner rewards. An agent prescribed for a non-psychiatric indication can still satisfy the serotonergic definition, and an antiemetic or a prokinetic that antagonises dopamine receptors satisfies the other one without ever having been prescribed as an antipsychotic. The withdrawal route leaves nothing on the chart to find at all: there the offending change is a dopaminergic drug that has been stopped or cut, and only the dates will show it. Candidates who scan the drug chart for a diagnostic category miss all of these. Candidates who scan it for a mechanism find them. The receptor pharmacology that underlies these two definitions, taken as a principle rather than as an application, belongs to the Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes.

The word *only* in the serotonergic half is load-bearing and cuts in one direction. It closes the causal route in: a patient with no serotonergic exposure at all does not have serotonin toxicity, whatever the picture looks like. It does not work in reverse, because being on a serotonergic agent does not exclude the other syndrome, and a great many patients are on both kinds of drug at once. The class discriminator is therefore a strong exclusion and a weak inclusion, and it has to be used in that direction. That asymmetry is the whole of the difficulty in this item and is taken up below.

4.3 Tempo: the discriminator that costs nothing to obtain

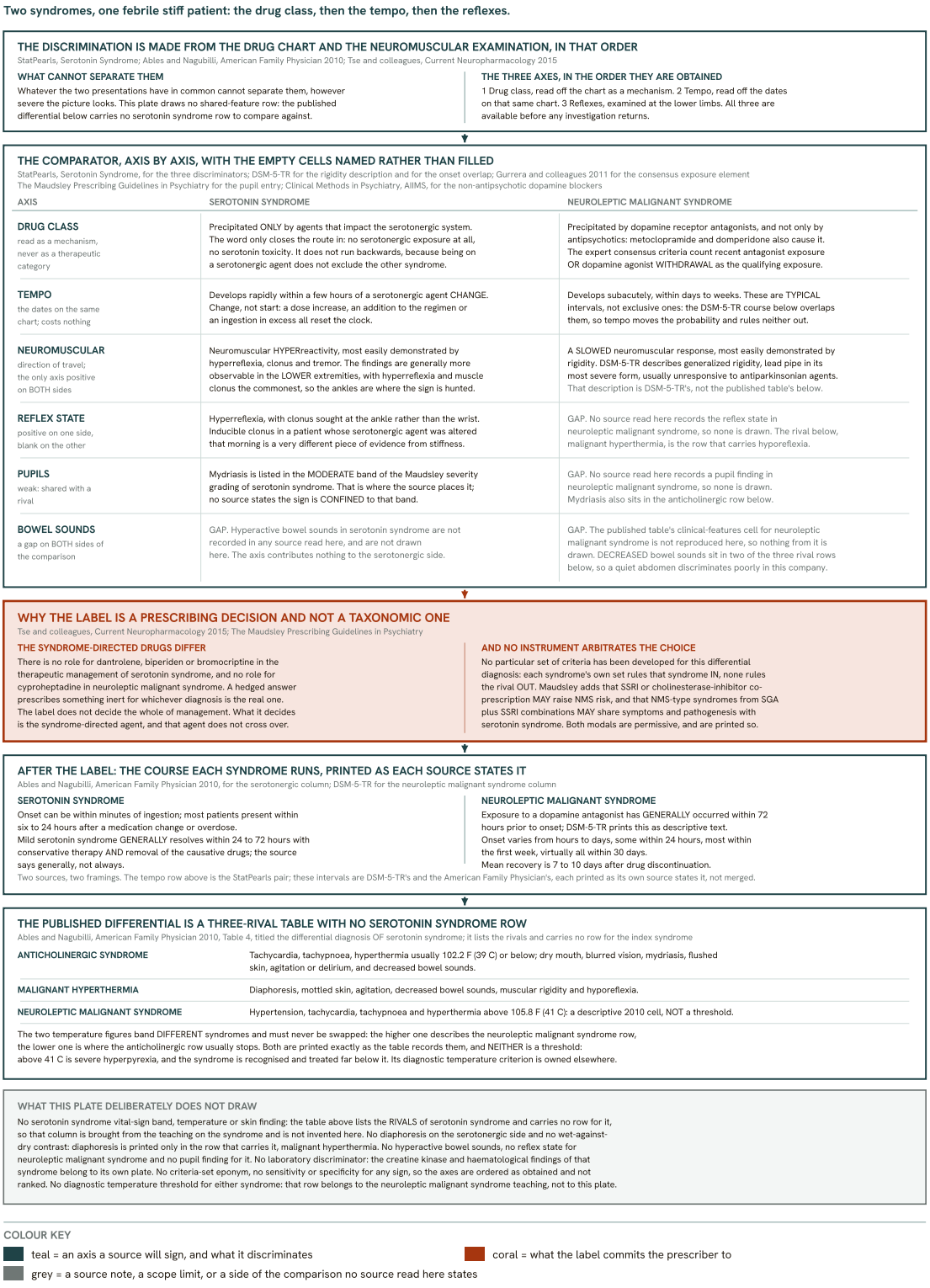


Fig 37.3 Serotonin syndrome against neuroleptic malignant syndrome: the axes that separate them, and the axes that are blank on one side. The three discriminators are obtained in order, drug class then tempo then reflexes, and only the neuromuscular axis returns a positive finding on both sides. Pupils, bowel sounds and the NMS reflex state are drawn as declared gaps rather than filled: the published differential lists the rivals OF serotonin syndrome and carries no row for the syndrome itself, and its two temperature figures band the anticholinergic and NMS rows, never the serotonergic one, and neither is a diagnostic threshold. (StatPearls, Serotonin Syndrome; Ables and Nagubilli, American Family Physician 2010, Table 4; Tse and colleagues, Current

Neuropharmacology 2015; DSM-5-TR; The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines in Psychiatry; Clinical Methods in Psychiatry, AIIMS.)

The second discriminator is **tempo**, and it is the cheapest one available because the drug chart already carries it. StatPearls times serotonin syndrome to within a few hours of a serotonergic agent change, and neuroleptic malignant syndrome to a subacute development over days to weeks. Those are typical intervals, not exclusive ones. Neuroleptic malignant syndrome can begin far earlier than a subacute description implies, early enough to fall inside the serotonergic window, so the two overlap at their edges. Tempo therefore moves the probability and rules neither syndrome out: clonus hours after a dose change with no antipsychotic exposure is strong evidence, a slow build over a fortnight after an antipsychotic was started is strong evidence the other way, and a stiff, febrile patient on the second day of both drugs is the case tempo cannot settle. The full onset range for neuroleptic malignant syndrome is taught with that syndrome elsewhere in these notes.

Two details make it usable. The first is the word *change*: the trigger is not restricted to a newly started drug, so an increase in dose, an addition to an existing regimen, or an ingestion in excess all reset the clock. The second is that tempo can only be read from a drug chart that carries dates. A history that establishes the patient has been on both an antipsychotic and a serotonergic agent, without establishing when either was last altered, has recorded the exposure and thrown away the discriminator built on it. The accompanying figure sets the tempo axis alongside the other axes of the comparison.

Hours	Days to weeks	Zero	39 C or below
SEROTONIN SYNDROME ONSET, TYPICALLY	NMS ONSET, TYPICALLY	CRITERIA SETS FOR THIS DIFFERENTIAL	ANTICHOLINERGIC ROW, USUALLY

PITFALL

Writing "on olanzapine and escitalopram" in the admission note and nothing more. The entry looks complete and destroys the tempo discriminator, because the reviewer at midnight cannot tell whether one of those agents was changed that morning or has run unchanged for a year. Record the date of the last change to every psychotropic on the chart, not merely the fact of the prescription. The same entry is what a colleague will use to decide whether the picture that develops overnight is the illness or the treatment.

4.4 The neuromuscular examination: opposite directions of travel

The third discriminator is the one that is actually examined, and its strength is that both syndromes give a positive finding rather than one giving a finding and the other giving nothing. StatPearls records the direction of travel as opposite in the two: serotonin syndrome shows **neuromuscular hyperreactivity**, most easily demonstrated by hyperreflexia, clonus and tremor, whereas the examination in neuroleptic malignant syndrome shows a **slowed neuromuscular response**, most easily demonstrated by rigidity.

Stated that way the axis is easy to remember and easy to misapply, because rigidity and hyperreactivity are not mutually exclusive appearances at the bedside. A patient with marked

tremor and increased tone can be described by an inexperienced examiner as stiff. Reflexes and clonus are usually more discriminating than tone alone, which is why the examination has to be performed rather than inferred from the general impression of a rigid, febrile patient. They are not infallible: severe rigidity can obscure them, so an examination that returns no clonus is read alongside the exposure and the tempo rather than banked as a negative result.

Where to look is also specified. The same source records the neuromuscular findings in serotonin syndrome as generally more observable in the lower extremities, with hyperreflexia and muscle **clonus** the most common findings. That is a practical instruction: an upper-limb examination in a restless patient can be equivocal when an ankle examination is not, so the ankles are where the sign is hunted. Inducible clonus at the ankle in a patient whose serotonergic agent was altered that morning is a very different piece of evidence from generalised stiffness in a patient started on an antipsychotic a fortnight ago.

MNEMONIC

Drug class, Tempo, Reflexes

The three axes this comparison actually rests on, in the order they are obtained. The drug class comes from the chart, the tempo from the dates on that chart, and the reflexes from the lower limbs. All three are available before any investigation returns, and none of them requires the patient to be able to give a history.

4.5 The wider differential, and the shape of the published comparison

The two syndromes do not sit alone. The standard published differential of serotonin syndrome, in the American Family Physician review by Ables and Nagubilli, is a three-rival comparison, and its structure teaches something before any of its content does. AAFP Table 4 is titled as the differential diagnosis of serotonin syndrome and its rows are **anticholinergic syndrome**, **malignant hyperthermia** and neuroleptic malignant syndrome. It lists the rivals; it carries no row for the index syndrome itself. A candidate reading it as a two-column contrast will find one column missing, and the serotonin-toxicity side of every axis below has to be brought from the teaching on that syndrome rather than read off the table.

RIVAL IN THE PUBLISHED DIFFERENTIAL	WHAT THAT ROW RECORDS	WHERE THE SEPARATION IS SOUGHT
Anticholinergic syndrome	Tachycardia, tachypnoea and hyperthermia usually **102.2 F (39 C)** or below, with dry mouth, blurred vision, mydriasis, flushed skin, agitation or delirium, and decreased bowel sounds	The mucosa and the skin, which this row records as dry, and a fever band that stops lower than the others
Malignant hyperthermia	Diaphoresis, mottled skin, agitation, decreased bowel sounds, muscular rigidity and hyporeflexia	The exposure history, and reflexes that are depressed rather than brisk beside rigidity
Neuroleptic malignant syndrome	Hypertension, tachycardia, tachypnoea and hyperthermia above **105.8 F (41 C)**, which is how this 2010 table describes the row and is not a diagnostic threshold	The prescribed class and the interval since it changed, before any physical sign. The temperature is not the separator here, and the syndrome is diagnosed well below this figure

Three points earn marks off that table. Mydriasis appears in the anticholinergic row, so a dilated pupil is not by itself a serotonergic sign. Decreased bowel sounds appear in two of the three rows, so a quiet abdomen discriminates poorly in this company. And the two temperature figures band different syndromes and must not be swapped: the higher one describes the neuroleptic malignant syndrome row, the lower one is where the anticholinergic row usually stops. Neither figure is a diagnostic threshold, and the higher one is dangerous read as one. Above 41 C is severe hyperpyrexia; neuroleptic malignant syndrome is recognised and treated far below that, so a candidate who waits for the table's number before naming the syndrome has misread a descriptive cell as a criterion. The diagnostic temperature criterion is taught with that syndrome elsewhere in these notes and is deliberately not printed here. Anticholinergic toxicity, lithium toxicity and malignant catatonia are taught as entities in their own right elsewhere in these notes; what belongs here is only their role as rivals in this one comparison.

4.6 The criteria question, and what no instrument will do for you

Candidates reach for a criteria set at exactly this point, and the reach is the trap. Each syndrome has a named criteria set of its own, taught with that syndrome elsewhere in these notes, and each was constructed to identify its own syndrome in a patient suspected of having it. An instrument built to rule one condition in is not, by construction, an instrument that rules a rival out. The review in Current Neuropharmacology states the position for this pair directly: no particular set of criteria has been developed for this differential diagnosis.

TRAP **Quoting a criteria set as though satisfying it excluded the other syndrome.** A patient exposed to both drug classes can satisfy a serotonin-toxicity criteria set and still have the other diagnosis, because those criteria were validated to identify serotonin toxicity and not to exclude the rival syndrome, and a mixed exposure can produce findings that satisfy them anyway. The examiner is testing whether the candidate knows that the published instruments are diagnostic aids for one syndrome each, and that none has been validated against the specific problem of choosing between the two.

TRAP **Treating the two syndromes as points on one hyperthermic spectrum and hedging the management.** Candidates who cannot decide sometimes write that they would cover both. The published position is the opposite of a spectrum: the syndrome-directed agents used in one have no role in the other, so a hedged answer adds a drug that is inert for whichever diagnosis is real, and it tells the examiner the candidate never made the discrimination. Stopping the suspect agent and supporting the patient is not the hedge, because that is shared ground. Prescribing both syndrome-directed drugs is.

4.7 The patient who is on both drug classes

This is the case the item exists for, and it is the case the discriminators handle worst. The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines state that co-prescription of SSRIs or cholinesterase inhibitors with antipsychotic medication may increase the risk of neuroleptic malignant syndrome, and that NMS-type syndromes induced by combinations of second-generation antipsychotic and SSRI medications may share their symptoms and pathogenesis with the serotonin syndrome. The modal in both statements is permissive and must be reproduced as such: this is a stated possibility about risk and about shared mechanism, not an established equivalence between the two syndromes.

Hold that beside the criteria position and the picture is coherent rather than merely unsatisfying. The combination that is hardest to classify is also the combination in which the two syndromes are suggested to overlap in mechanism, and it is precisely the combination for which nobody has built a discriminating instrument. The honest teaching is that in the co-prescribed patient the discrimination rests on the drug history and the physical examination, and that a confident label offered without either is a guess wearing a diagnosis.

IN INDIA

Antipsychotic and SSRI co-prescription is routine practice here, so the ambiguous case is the ordinary case rather than the examination curiosity. Two decisions follow. Date every change to both drugs in the notes, because co-prescription is what weakens the drug-class axis and tempo is one of the two discriminators left standing when a patient arrives already on both. The other is the neuromuscular examination, and both have to be recorded. And examine the ankles for reflexes and clonus in every febrile, stiff patient on a combined regimen, because that examination is free, is available in any setting, and is the one axis that gives a positive finding on both sides of the comparison. Do not wait for a criteria set to arbitrate, because none has been developed for this differential.

4.8 Writing the comparison, and what the label commits you to

A comparative-differentiation answer is marked on structure. Four elements carry it, and they are obtained in this order.

- The pharmacological class of every agent on the chart, read as a mechanism rather than as an indication, because that is the discriminator the source puts first.
- The date of the last change to each of those agents, which is what makes the tempo axis readable at all.
- The neuromuscular examination, directed at the lower limbs, looking for the direction of travel rather than for stiffness alone.
- The named diagnosis, followed by the statement that the syndrome-directed drug for one has no role in the other, which is what makes the naming consequential.

On management the boundary holds. The locus of care and the escalation belong to the Perinatal/women's mental health and emergency psychiatry notes. What the discrimination decides is the focus and the mode: the offending agent to be stopped is identified by the class definition above, and the specific agent added afterwards belongs to whichever syndrome has been named, since the review is explicit that neither syndrome's named agents have a role in the other. Each syndrome's own management, in full, is taught with that syndrome elsewhere in these notes and is not repeated here.

GOOD TO REMEMBER

When the diagnosis is genuinely undecided in a co-prescribed patient, what is not in dispute is withdrawal of the suspect agents and the supportive care around that withdrawal, because those steps are common to both syndromes while the syndrome-directed drug that follows is specific to one of them. Deciding which agent is suspect returns you to the class definitions, which is why those two definitions are worth knowing verbatim rather than approximately.

The prescription and the reflexes decide this comparison, the tempo shifts it without settling it, and the decision commits the patient to one of two syndrome-directed drugs, neither of which has a role in the other syndrome.

5 · Other psychotropic emergencies (anticholinergic toxicity, lithium toxicity, malignant catatonia)

Two of these three states are made by the prescription; the third is made by the illness and then complicated by it. Anticholinergic toxicity and lithium toxicity are drug toxicities. Malignant catatonia is not: it is a severe catatonic state usually complicating a psychiatric or medical disorder, and the prescription enters as a competing explanation rather than a cause. The three are grouped because in each of them the drug history does work that no bedside sign can do: it names or excludes a mechanism, it fixes what a measured concentration is allowed to mean, and it decides what happens to the prescription afterwards. The emergency-department presentation, the resuscitation and the disposition belong to the Perinatal/women's mental health

and emergency psychiatry notes, and the receptor logic behind each drug class belongs to the Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes. What is examined here is the pharmacology in between: which agents and combinations produce the state, what a serum value can and cannot settle, which prescriptions carry a stable patient across the line, and what the standard sources actually say about treating each one.

5.1 The anticholinergic toxidrome, and the mnemonic that does not quite fit

Muscarinic blockade produces a picture stereotyped enough to be taught as a rhyme. StatPearls sets out the **anticholinergic toxidrome** in six phrases, and then lists the signs they stand for.

MNEMONIC

red as a beet, dry as a bone, blind as a bat, mad as a hatter, hot as a hare, full as a flask

The signs the same source pairs with them are flushing, anhydrosis, dry mucous membranes, mydriasis, altered mental status, fever and urinary retention, with decreased bowel sounds a further common finding. Count the two lists against each other before reciting them: there are seven signs against six phrases, so the one-to-one correspondence the source implies does not fully resolve, and the rhyme is a memory aid rather than a mapping.

Central involvement is what turns this from an unpleasant side-effect burden into an emergency. The same account gives delirium, hallucinations, agitation, restlessness and confusion, together with the two features it treats as characteristic of this particular delirium, **staccato speech** and picking at clothing and bedding, and notes that seizures and jerking movements are possible. The peripheral half of the syndrome tells you which receptor is blocked; the central half tells you the patient is in trouble.

The pharmacological point that organises all of it is that the offending agents are seldom labelled anticholinergics. Tricyclic antidepressants, low-potency first-generation antipsychotics, clozapine, the antiparkinsonian anticholinergics prescribed for extrapyramidal side effects, sedating antihistamines and a long tail of preparations bought without prescription all contribute, and the burden is additive across them. Toxicity may follow a single agent taken in overdose, and it may equally be an arithmetic problem across a whole prescription with no one drug on it at fault, which is why the drug history has to be taken by class of action and not by indication.

5.2 Benzodiazepine first, antidote second

The treatment sequence is examined more often than the toxidrome and it is counter-intuitive. StatPearls makes intravenous benzodiazepines the first-line therapy for agitation, potentially in large doses, in anticholinergic poisoning, and does not put the antidote first.

RULE **Treat the agitation before you treat the receptor.** The sequence is StatPearls' own, and what recommends it is that sedation stakes less on the diagnosis being right than a specific antidote does. A benzodiazepine is not thereby harmless: in the doses this picture needs it can deepen the confusion and compromise breathing. Whether the antidote follows turns on diagnostic confidence, the electrocardiogram and the contraindications, a toxicology decision this account does not make. A stem describing an agitated, flushed, dry, urinary-retaining patient is testing whether the candidate sedates first and reserves the antidote for the case that earns it.

Physostigmine is the specific antidote, a cholinesterase inhibitor whose effect is felt centrally as well as peripherally, and the source notes that it is usually only given in the case of both peripheral and central signs and symptoms of anticholinergic poisoning. That is a description of practice and not an eligibility rule, though it does encode a differential test as much as a treatment threshold. A purely peripheral picture seldom calls for a centrally acting drug, and a central picture with no peripheral signs at all is a reason to reopen the differential rather than to reach for the antidote.

The figures are worth carrying, with the caveat attached to them. StatPearls gives the recommended physostigmine dose in anticholinergic poisoning as **0.5 to 2 mg IV for adults and 0.02 mg/kg IV for paediatric patients, with a maximum paediatric dose of 0.5 mg**. Read that as a stated dose with a paediatric ceiling rather than as a full regimen: no dosing frequency and no adult maximum are stated with it, no titration schedule is carried, and no separate initiation dose sits below it, because the source prints one recommended dose rather than the first step of a schedule. It states no administration rate either, and rate is not a detail: Dawson and Buckley's review of anticholinergic delirium describes physostigmine as titrated intravenously under monitoring, because speed of administration is where the cholinergic and cardiac risk sits. No rate is carried here, and the figure above is not licence to give the dose in one push. That is an internationally recommended dose from a source that carries no Indian regulatory or formulary statement with it, so whether a given unit here can obtain the drug at all is a local question this account does not answer.

5.3 Lithium toxicity: the number, and the band it sits above

Lithium toxicity is the psychotropic emergency tied most closely to a laboratory value, but the value supports the diagnosis rather than making it: exposure pattern, renal function, clinical state and the direction of serial concentrations settle both the toxicity and what is done about it. Meyer and Stahl's Lithium Handbook records that in contemporary usage toxicity is often defined as a serum concentration of **1.5 mEq/L or above**. The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines describe the same territory in bands: above 1.5 mmol/L toxic effects reliably occur and usually consist of gastrointestinal effects, increasing anorexia, nausea and diarrhoea, and central effects, muscle weakness, drowsiness, confusion, ataxia, coarse tremor and muscle twitching, while above 2 mmol/L increased disorientation and seizures usually occur, which can progress to coma and ultimately death. The hedge is the source's own: both bands are stated as what usually happens. The same section then limits its own figures, noting that these plasma concentrations are only a guide, and individuals vary in their susceptibility to symptoms of toxicity.

What makes the threshold examinable is how close it sits to the top of the treatment band. The Indian Psychiatric Society bipolar guideline states in its narrative that target serum concentrations for acute-phase efficacy fall between 0.6 and 1.2 meq/l. The distance between the top of that band and the concentration at which toxicity is defined is small, and that narrowness, not the absolute value of either figure, is the argument for measuring the drug at all. The published target ranges for the individual agents are taught with therapeutic drug monitoring; what belongs here is only where the band stops.

TRAP **Quoting one guideline's lithium target as though the guideline held only one.** The Indian Psychiatric Society bipolar guideline disagrees with itself. Its narrative adds that 0.4 to 0.8 meq/l may suffice for older adults, which is a permissive statement rather than a target; its own episode-specific dosing tables give a different older-adult figure again, and no erratum reconciles the two loci. A candidate who quotes either one alone is wrong against the other part of the same document, so name the disagreement instead of resolving it.

5.4 Three exposure patterns, and why the same value is not the same event

A serum concentration measures the compartment that is easy to sample, not the one that matters. The Lithium Handbook classifies toxicity by exposure pattern into acute, **acute on chronic** and chronic, and records that the latter two are the more serious in nature and account for the great majority of overdose or toxicity presentations. It gives the mechanism in the same chapter: patients chronically treated with lithium already carry brain concentrations high enough that an acute ingestion, or prolonged exposure to toxic levels, typically 2.0 mEq/L or above, is associated with poorer outcomes than comparable exposures in a lithium-naive patient.

RULE **Ask how long, not only how much.** The identical concentration in someone who swallowed a bottle yesterday and in someone who has taken lithium for a decade describes two different brain exposures, and the sources rank the chronic and acute-on-chronic patterns as the more serious ones. Duration of exposure is part of reading the value, not background to it.

Against that, the routine case has become uncommon. The Lithium Handbook records that modern monitoring schemes and serum concentration ranges have significantly lowered rates of lithium toxicity, and gives an incidence figure reported in longitudinal studies, with a Swedish cohort named alongside it. No comparable Indian incidence figure is available, so the rarity should be read as a property of well-monitored practice rather than as a property of the drug.

5.5 When the concentration is not the syndrome

The most dangerous lithium result is a normal one. The Maudsley guidelines record that neurotoxicity at normal plasma concentrations has also been described, because brain lithium concentrations may not be reflected in the plasma. That one sentence dismantles the reflex that a value inside the range excludes toxicity, and it is why this diagnosis is clinical with laboratory support rather than the reverse.

The severe end of that spectrum has a name. **SILENT**, the syndrome of irreversible lithium-effectuated neurotoxicity, denotes neurological sequelae that persist after the drug has been withdrawn, the original description setting the boundary at sequelae still present at least two

months after lithium is stopped. Persistent cerebellar dysfunction is the commonest pattern, not the whole of the definition. A review of published cases found that among the subset of 51 cases with persistent cerebellar symptoms whose peak concentrations were under 2.5 mEq/l, fever or infection was a strong predictor, with an odds ratio of 13.9 (95% CI 3.21 to 60.05), while in the 34 cases whose peak concentrations reached or exceeded that figure fever was not a significant predictor of cerebellar sequelae. Read the scope carefully. This is a review of published cases, and 2.5 mEq/l is that review's cut, not a validated line above which a patient is in danger and below which the numbers reassure. Within that selected material, fever or infection carried the association with persistent cerebellar sequelae in the subgroup under the cut, and not in the subgroup above it.

PITFALL

Sending the ataxic patient home because the level came back in range. Brain and plasma are not the same compartment and the source describes neurotoxicity at normal plasma concentrations, so new coarse tremor, ataxia or confusion in a lithium-treated patient is a neurological problem that needs an explanation whatever the assay says. Where a febrile illness sits behind it, the fever is not a side issue to the lithium question; in the reviewed cases whose peak concentrations stayed under the review's own cut, it was the variable that carried the association with persistent cerebellar sequelae.

5.6 The prescriptions, and the sample, that anticipate it

Lithium offers no receptor profile from which to predict its adverse effects. What predicts them is exposure: how much drug, for how long, and what is happening to its clearance. The interactions that matter are therefore the ones that alter renal handling of sodium and water, and they come from general medicine rather than from psychiatry. The Maudsley guidelines report that in the elderly, angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors increase seven-fold the risk of hospitalisation due to lithium toxicity. For thiazide diuretics the timing is predictable and the size of the effect is not: concentrations usually rise within 10 days of the diuretic being prescribed, and the magnitude of that rise varies widely between patients, which means no safe assumption can be made about how far a given patient will move.

The Indian Psychiatric Society bipolar guideline converts the same pharmacology into a monitoring instruction, naming the patients who need **more frequent monitoring**.

- Older adults.
- Those receiving diuretics.
- Those receiving non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs or angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitors.
- Those with renal impairment.

None of it is interpretable without the sampling rule attached to it. The same guideline requires that the lithium sample be drawn **11 to 13 hours after the last dose**, and before the next dose where the drug is given twice or three times daily. That window belongs to routine monitoring: a

concentration drawn outside it cannot be read against the monitoring bands and will not carry a dose change. It is not a reason to withhold a level from a patient who looks toxic. In suspected poisoning the sample is taken on presentation and repeated, and the interpretation rests on that trend, the time since the last dose and the clinical state.

>90%	48%	25 to 400%	0.01
CHRONIC OR ACUTE ON CHRONIC	REVIEWED SILENT CASES WITH FEVER OR INFECTION	RISE AFTER A THIAZIDE IS ADDED	TOXICITY EPISODES PER PATIENT-YEAR

IN INDIA

Two outpatient decisions follow from that footnote and that sampling rule. First, ask about analgesics by name at every review rather than asking whether the patient takes any other medicines: an anti-inflammatory bought across a counter is not experienced as a prescription and will not be volunteered, yet the guideline names that class alongside diuretics and angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitors as a reason to measure more often. Second, book the blood draw to the guideline's own post-dose window rather than to whatever hour the patient reaches the clinic, because a conveniently timed sample cannot support a dose change in either direction. The unwell patient is the exception noted above: there the blood is drawn on arrival and repeated, not deferred to the next morning's window.

5.7 Malignant catatonia, and the syndrome it may not be separable from

Malignant catatonia is the third emergency and the hardest to place, because the authorities that describe it say it may not be separable from something else. The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines state that it may not be distinguishable from neuroleptic malignant syndrome, either clinically or by laboratory testing, and that this has prompted the view that the latter may be a variant form of the former. DSM-5-TR says the same thing from the opposite direction, in its differential diagnosis of neuroleptic malignant syndrome: malignant catatonia may be indistinguishable from it, and some investigators consider neuroleptic malignant syndrome to be a drug-induced form of malignant catatonia. Two standard sources converging on the same non-separation is not a gap in the literature to be filled in an answer; it is the finding.

That leaves the drug history as the most useful discriminator, and the sources are precise about how far it reaches. In the absence of any prior or recent administration of a **dopamine antagonist**, the Maudsley position is that neuroleptic malignant syndrome can probably be ruled out. The hedge is the source's word and is not to be upgraded, and the exclusion is about antagonist-associated disease: the fall in central dopaminergic activity that produces the syndrome also follows abrupt withdrawal of dopaminergic treatment, which no drug chart records as an exposure. The drug history shifts the probability; it does not settle the diagnosis. What the source does not state is the converse.

TRAP **Reading the exclusion rule backwards.** One inference is licensed, and only along the antagonist route: no dopamine antagonist, probably not neuroleptic malignant syndrome. The converse, that recent exposure makes the diagnosis, is not licensed, and the converse is what candidates write. A catatonic patient who has also received an antipsychotic has two candidate states and one shared laboratory picture, and naming the exposure does not choose between them.

The exposure list is also wider than the antipsychotics. The Maudsley guidelines record that neuroleptic malignant syndrome is also sometimes seen with antidepressants, valproate, phenytoin and lithium. That matters twice in this topic: it widens the prescription review that has to be done before the syndrome is excluded on drug-history grounds, and it puts lithium on both sides of the same page, as an agent that produces its own concentration-defined emergency and as an agent occasionally implicated in this one.

5.8 Pharmacological management, and the marker the two share

Malignant catatonia is not defined here by a criteria set, and that absence is part of the teaching. The standard guidelines and textbooks describe it as a clinical state and say that it may not be distinguishable from neuroleptic malignant syndrome, either clinically or by laboratory testing; none of them supplies a threshold that makes catatonia malignant. An answer that produces criteria for it has invented them. The rating instrument for catatonia and the challenge test that establishes the diagnosis belong with the catatonia teaching rather than with this emergency, and are not redrawn here.

Treatment, in the sources read for this topic, is stated for the refractory case only. The Indian Psychiatric Society schizophrenia guideline places dantrolene and dopamine agonists like bromocriptine in refractory malignant catatonia. Read the qualifier rather than the drug names: refractory. These agents are named for the case that has not responded, and the guideline does not present them as the opening pharmacological move. The emergency act itself, including escalation and the disposition decision, belongs to the Perinatal/women's mental health and emergency psychiatry notes.

EMERGENCY	WHAT PRODUCES IT	WHAT A MEASUREMENT CONTRIBUTES	THE COMMONEST WRONG INFERENCE
Anticholinergic toxicity	A single agent in overdose, or additive antimuscarinic burden across prescribed and over-the-counter agents	No defining concentration; the peripheral and central halves of the syndrome are what gate the antidote	That the specific antidote is the opening move
Lithium toxicity	Acute ingestion, or accumulation from impaired renal clearance, volume or sodium depletion, a dosing error or an interacting drug	Support, not a verdict: read against the bands only on a correctly timed sample, and in suspected toxicity it is the serial trend with the exposure pattern that counts	That a value inside the treatment range excludes neurotoxicity
Malignant catatonia	Usually a severe catatonic state arising in psychiatric or medical illness, not a drug effect; antipsychotic exposure raises the competing possibility of neuroleptic malignant syndrome and may worsen the catatonia	Nothing discriminating; the laboratory picture is shared with neuroleptic malignant syndrome	That recent dopamine antagonist exposure settles the diagnosis

GOOD TO REMEMBER

Kaplan and Sadock's Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry supplies the one laboratory value the two overlapping states share: serum **creatine kinase** is especially elevated in malignant catatonia and in neuroleptic malignant syndrome and can increase the risk of renal failure, and should be tracked to ensure a downtrend. The instruction is serial, not single. One raised value describes a moment; a falling series is one objective marker that the decision already taken is working, read alongside temperature, autonomic stability, rigidity and renal function rather than in place of them, and the cheapest of them in any unit.

In all three emergencies the prescription is where the reading starts and not where the diagnosis ends: read the exposure and its duration first, then the number, never the number by itself, and remember that the third of them can arrive in a patient whose drug chart had nothing to do with it.

Treatment resistance and augmentation

6 · Treatment-resistant depression: definition, staging and assessment

Resistance is a judgment on the treatment record before it is a statement about the patient. Almost every element of the definition of treatment-resistant depression is a convention that

somebody wrote down: how many failed trials, how large a fall in symptoms counts as a response, how long a trial must run before it may be called failed, and whether the failures have to be pharmacological at all. Different bodies settled those questions differently, and the better ones say so in the same paragraph as their own definition. Marks here go to an answer that states a definition and names whose it is, shows what has to be excluded before the label is applied, knows the response arithmetic sitting underneath it, and can say why the staging models built to grade resistance never entered routine practice. It is examined as a definition question and it is answered badly as one, because the definition is the least interesting part of the topic.

6.1 The definition, and the bodies that issue it

The most widely used definition of **treatment-resistant depression** is inadequate response to **a minimum of two antidepressants** given at **adequate dose and duration** with adherence confirmed, and it carries regulatory weight because both the United States Food and Drug Administration and the European Medicines Agency have adopted it. The Indian CPG 2025 sets the same bar, at least two antidepressants at adequate dose and duration, then qualifies it in the same breath: definitions vary, and they commonly overlook psychological and neurostimulation treatments and partial responses. CANMAT 2023 is blunter, recording that a universal consensus definition is lacking and that the most frequently used one is failure to respond to at least two antidepressant trials at a therapeutic dose and adequate duration. One caveat attaches to that third attribution and not to the bar itself: the CANMAT sentence quoted here could not be located in the copy of the 2023 update used for these notes, so treat the CANMAT wording as unverified and rest the two-antidepressant threshold on the regulatory and Indian statements, which are. Three bodies, one arithmetic core, and an open admission from two of them that the core is an agreement rather than a finding.

The operational detail is where they separate. The accompanying table puts the same four questions to each definition, and the blanks are as informative as the entries: a definition that fixes a trial count without fixing a non-response threshold has left the harder half of the work undone.

DEFINITION	FAILED TRIALS REQUIRED	THRESHOLD FOR NON-RESPONSE	MINIMUM TRIAL LENGTH STATED
Food and Drug Administration and European Medicines Agency, as the most used definition	A minimum of two antidepressants, with adequacy of the trial and adherence both required	Not stated in the definition	Not stated in the definition
Indian CPG 2025	At least two antidepressants at adequate dose and duration	Not attached to the definition	Not attached to the definition
CANMAT 2023	At least two trials at a therapeutic dose and adequate duration	Not stated with the definition	Not stated with the definition
Canadian expert consensus, by modified Delphi	Fixed by the consensus; figure not printed here	Fixed by the consensus; figure not printed here	Fixed by the consensus; interval not printed here
European Group for the Study of Resistant Depression	Consecutive adequate trials, characterised by named clinical predictors; the count and the predictors are not printed here	Below 50 percent symptom reduction	Not stated in the account used here

Only the Canadian consensus fixes all four, and its own report states the level of agreement each of those items reached at GRADE-high evidence. None of the four values, and none of the agreement figures, is printed in this account. The Delphi report itself could not be consulted here, and every one of those numbers is one a reader would apply to a patient's trial record, so the table says which columns the consensus filled and leaves the values to the paper. What the comparison still shows is the shape of the problem: a formal vote was needed to fix elements the other definitions leave open, which is a fair measure of how soft the ground is. The European group adds something the others leave out: it characterises its trials by the clinical features that travel with resistance rather than by the trials alone, and it operationalises response with validated rating scales instead of clinical impression. How many consecutive trials it requires, and which clinical features it names, both come from a table this account could not check against the original report either, so the requirement is described as a class and its contents are not listed.

RULE **Treatment resistance is an operational judgment, not a property of the illness alone.** It combines documented adequate treatment exposure, meaning how many agents, at what dose, for how long, and whether they were swallowed, with inadequate clinical response in a depressive illness. The exposure half is entirely a matter of record, which is why the first move on meeting an apparent non-responder is to audit the treatment record rather than escalate the regimen, and why the guidelines quoted here prescribe a reappraisal before the next prescription.

6.2 What makes a trial adequate

The trial count is arithmetic; the word carrying the weight is adequate, and it has three limbs. Duration is the limb most often assigned a number, but the published thresholds are not uniform. Across the literature the minimum antidepressant trial duration cited for adequacy is typically 4 weeks, with a reported range running from 4 to 12 weeks. The Indian material sits at the shorter end and is stable across two editions of guidance: clinical improvement with an antidepressant typically appears after **4 to 6 weeks** of adequate treatment, and the IPS CPG 2017 depression guideline states that adequate treatment for at least 4 to 6 weeks is necessary before concluding that a patient is not responsive to a particular medication. The Canadian expert consensus voted on a minimum of its own, and for the reason given above that figure is left to its paper. The Indian interval, stable across two editions of guidance and matching the shorter end of the published range, is the one to carry into the hall.

Dose adequacy resists a single number because it is agent-specific: a therapeutic dose of one antidepressant is a fraction of the daily milligram figure of another, which is why the definitions ask for a therapeutic dose of that agent and not a universal one. Which agent is chosen within a class, and the pharmacokinetic reasoning that fixes what a therapeutic dose is, belong to the Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes. The third limb, adherence, is written into the most used definition itself, which is why it has to be confirmed rather than assumed before a trial is counted as failed.

6.3 How much improvement counts as a response

A trial can only fail against a threshold, and the conventional set is straightforward: a **partial response** is at least 25 percent but less than 50 percent improvement and **non-response** is **less than 25 percent improvement**. The 50 percent mark is where a response begins, so the three categories partition the range without overlapping. The resistance literature works from the upper of those two boundaries, not the lower. The European Group for the Study of Resistant Depression identifies resistance as below 50 percent symptom reduction, and the Canadian consensus voted a threshold of its own that this account does not print. A patient who is a partial responder on the conventional set can therefore be counted a non-responder by the resistance definitions, and the two words are not interchangeable in a written answer.

TRAP **Reading a response-monitoring rule as an adequacy criterion.** The IPS CPG 2025 depression guideline directs that where less than 50 percent improvement is observed even after 6 to 8 weeks of treatment at optimal dose with good adherence, treatment is modified by either switching or augmenting. That is a decision rule for a trial already under way, and it belongs to the guideline's material on how long an antidepressant is continued, not to its account of resistance. The section defining resistance asks only for an adequate dose and duration and attaches no number to either. A candidate who converts the monitoring interval into the adequacy threshold has printed a figure the guideline never issued as one.

6.4 Pseudo-resistance, and the work that precedes the label

The first question to put to an apparent non-responder is whether the resistance is real. A substantial proportion of apparent treatment resistance is **pseudo-resistance**, arising from

inadequate trials or non-adherence rather than true refractoriness. The distinction changes the action completely: one situation calls for finishing a trial that was never finished, the other for moving past it. Indian guidance puts the audit first, stating that the first step in caring for a patient who has not responded to medication is a thorough review and reappraisal of the psychosocial and biological information base, aimed at re-verifying the diagnosis and identifying neglected contributing factors. That places a review, not an escalation, at the head of the algorithm.

MNEMONIC

Diagnosis, Adherence, Trials, Causes, Stressors

Five checks stand between a non-responder and the label. The first three interrogate what was prescribed and whether it was taken; the last two ask what else is holding the episode open. Work them in that order, because a diagnostic revision makes the trial history irrelevant, whereas a stressor identified first tempts the clinician to stop looking.

IN INDIA

Before confirming resistance, the Indian 2025 guideline requires five assessment steps: reassess the diagnosis, with bipolar disorder and comorbidity specifically in mind; check treatment adherence; review the adequacy of past trials for dose, duration and switching strategy; identify medical causes, naming hypothyroidism and vitamin deficiencies; and evaluate psychosocial stressors. Those two are given as examples of the medical causes to look for, not as a panel to run on every non-responder: investigate thyroid dysfunction or nutritional deficiency where the clinical assessment and the local protocol indicate it. The step sits before the label in the guideline's own order, so the question is settled while resistance is being considered rather than after it has been recorded.

PITFALL

Counting a trial the patient abandoned in the second week as one of the two failures. The trial count is the easiest part of the definition to satisfy on paper and the easiest to satisfy wrongly. An agent stopped early for side effects tested tolerability, not efficacy; an agent taken intermittently tested neither. For every past drug, establish the dose reached, the time spent at it, and how much of it was actually taken, before that drug is allowed into the count.

6.5 How common resistance is, and what each figure counts

Two prevalence figures are routinely quoted against one another and they count different things. Per the Indian 2017 guideline, initial treatment with an antidepressant fails to achieve a satisfactory response in approximately 20 to 30 percent of patients with depressive disorder, which is the failure rate of the first trial. Measured against the two-trial definition, **at least 30 percent** of people with depression meet criteria for resistance. The two numbers look alike and answer different questions, so setting them side by side as an Indian figure against a Western one is an error about denominators rather than about arithmetic. No Indian prevalence estimate for

resistance itself was available for this account; the defensible answer in a viva is to give the Western figure and label it as Western.

Attrition across successive treatment steps is the more useful teaching number, because it quantifies what each further attempt is worth.

36.8%	30.6%	13.7%	13.0%
FIRST STEP	SECOND STEP	THIRD STEP	FOURTH STEP

In STAR*D, QIDS-SR remission rates fell across the four successive acute treatment steps as shown, with an overall cumulative remission rate reported at 67 percent. The collapse between the second step and the third is the single most quotable finding in this literature, because it marks where the yield of simply trying another agent falls away, and it is the empirical argument for treating two failures as a decision point rather than an arbitrary one. The cumulative figure is a different matter.

TRAP **Quoting the cumulative remission figure as a settled result.** A reanalysis of the original STAR*D data found the overall remission rate to be 35 percent, as opposed to the claimed 67 percent, and the standard prescribing texts now print the reanalysis alongside the original. The step-wise rates are not what is contested; the cumulative arithmetic is. Quote the step-wise collapse freely, and never quote the cumulative figure without its reanalysis beside it.

6.6 The staging models, and what each of them grades

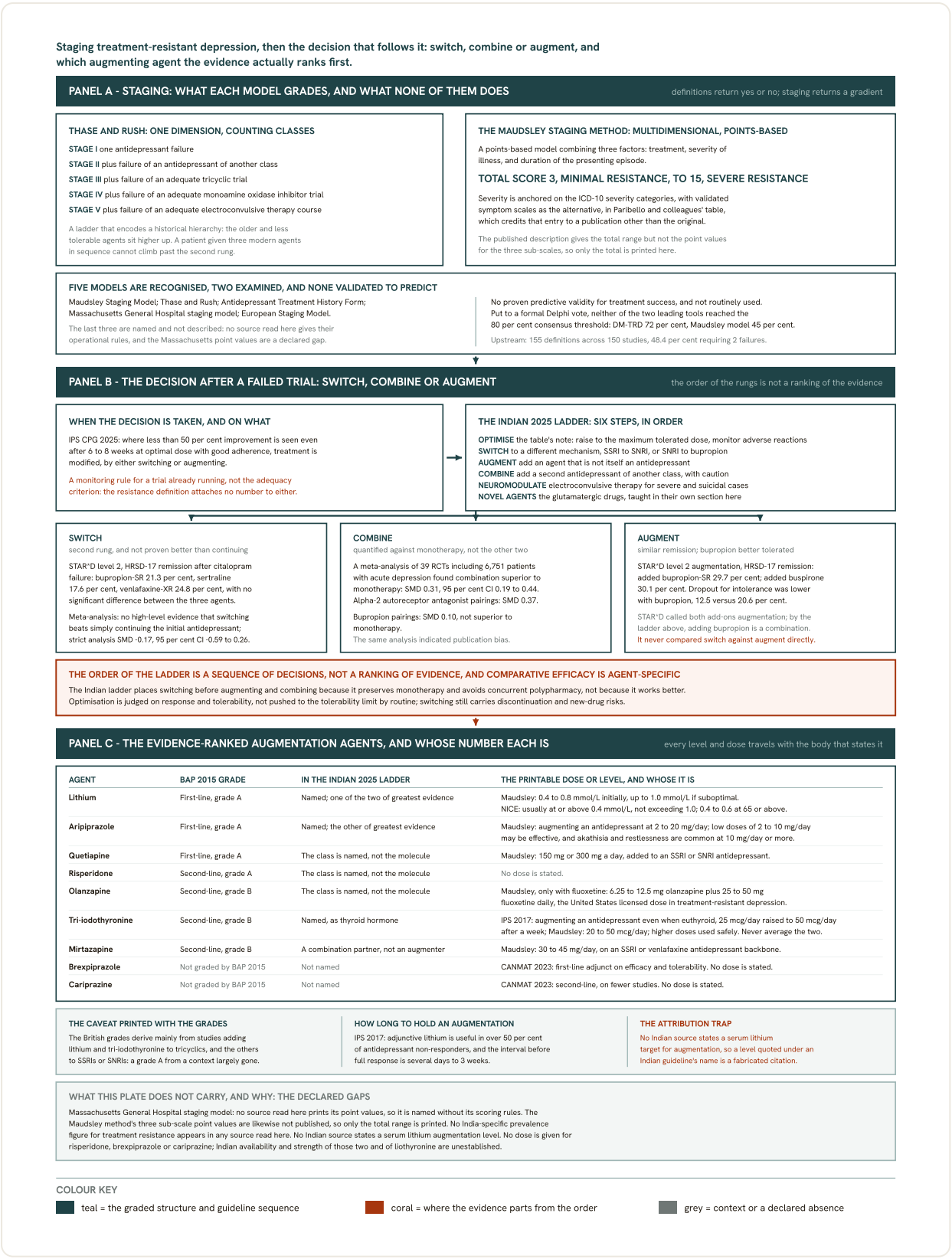


Fig 37.4 Staging treatment-resistant depression, then switching, combining or augmenting. Two of five recognised models are examined: Thase and Rush counts failed classes across five stages, the Maudsley method scores treatment, severity and duration to 3 to 15. Neither is validated to predict, and at a Delphi vote neither cleared 80 per cent. The Indian 2025 ladder runs optimise, switch, augment, combine, neuromodulate, novel agents, a decision sequence, not a ranking of evidence: switching is early because it preserves monotherapy, optimisation is the table's wording qualified in the rule box, and comparative efficacy is agent-specific. Every dose and level is attributed to the body stating it; the Indian guideline names the agents without a figure. (IPS CPG

2025 and 2017; Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines 15th edition; NICE NG222; BAP 2015; CANMAT 2023; STAR*D; Rybak and colleagues 2021; Paribello and colleagues 2026.)

Where a definition returns a yes or a no, **staging models** return a gradient. Five are recognised:

- the Maudsley Staging Model;
- the Thase and Rush model;
- the Antidepressant Treatment History Form;
- the Massachusetts General Hospital staging model;
- the European Staging Model.

Two of them are worth knowing in detail, because they grade different things and a question asking you to compare staging systems is asking for exactly that contrast. The **Thase and Rush model** is one-dimensional and counts classes: Stage I is a single antidepressant failure; Stage II adds failure of an antidepressant of another class; Stage III adds failure of an adequate tricyclic trial; Stage IV adds failure of an adequate monoamine oxidase inhibitor trial; and Stage V adds failure of a bilateral electroconvulsive therapy course. It is a ladder, and the ladder encodes a historical hierarchy in which the older and less tolerable agents sit higher up, which is both its clarity and its weakness: a patient given three modern agents in sequence cannot climb past the second rung. The procedure at the top rung is set out in the ECT and neurostimulation notes.

The **Maudsley Staging Method** is multidimensional. It is a points-based model combining three factors, treatment, severity of illness and duration of the presenting episode, scored so that the total runs from 3, marking minimal resistance, to 15, marking severe resistance. The published description gives the total range but not the point values for the three sub-scales, so only the total is printed here and the individual point allocations are to be taken from the original description. Learn the three dimensions, the direction of the scale and its two bounds. Because severity and chronicity carry points of their own, a patient with two failed trials and a severe, long-standing episode scores above a patient with two failed trials and a mild recent one, which is closer to how the difficulty is actually experienced in clinic.

How that severity dimension is anchored is stated in two places and the two must not be merged. The paper that first described the points-based model is the authority for the three factors and for the score range. The operationalised criteria attributed to the method in Paribello and colleagues' comparison table of staging systems are the ICD-10 severity categories, with validated symptom scales offered as an alternative, and that table credits its entry to a different publication on the same method rather than to the original description. Cite each to the paper that states it; a single citation covering both is wrong about one of them. The Massachusetts General Hospital model is named in the same reviews, but its scoring rules are not reproduced there, so no point values for it are given here.

6.7 Why none of this reaches the bedside

The candid position is that these staging models do not have proven predictive validity for treatment success and are not routinely used. That single sentence is worth more marks than any stage table, because it converts a list-learning answer into an appraisal. A staging system earns its

place by predicting something: which patient will respond to augmentation, which will need a procedural treatment, which will remit at all. These grade the past and have not been shown to forecast the future.

Formal consensus has said the same thing arithmetically. When the two leading staging tools were put to a Delphi vote, neither reached the 80 percent consensus threshold for recommendation: the DM-TRD scored 72 percent and the Maudsley staging model 45 percent. That same report states a different pair of figures for these two items in another passage of its own text; both cannot be the paper's figure, so only the pair given here is printed and the discrepancy is named rather than resolved.

The deeper trouble sits upstream of staging altogether. A systematic review by Brown and colleagues, published in the Canadian Journal of Psychiatry in 2019, identified 155 definitions of TRD in the published literature across 150 studies, and 48.4 percent of all definitions specified a requirement of at least 2 treatment failures. Both figures are that review's own count and are quoted on its authority. Read the second figure carefully, because it is the examinable one: a little under half of published definitions use the two-trial rule, which means that the population labelled resistant in one trial is not reliably the population labelled resistant in the next. Every efficacy figure quoted for a treatment in resistant depression inherits that imprecision, and it is the reason the switch, combination and augmentation evidence taken up later in this chapter has to be read against the definition each study used.

6.8 From resistant to difficult to treat

The terminology is moving, and the guidelines have moved ahead of the textbooks. The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines record a move to characterise treatment-resistant depression as **difficult to treat depression**, on the basis that the former description implies that depression treatments are normally effective and that non-response is therefore somehow abnormal. That rationale is worth reproducing accurately, because it is an argument about base rates rather than about kindness of language: if a third of patients do not respond to two adequate trials, non-response is a common outcome of treatment and not a deviation from it.

Indian practice has already adopted the reframing in its own text. In the IPS CPG 2025 depression guideline, difficult-to-treat depression is used as the holistic framework, while treatment-resistant depression is retained when referring to medication options or to studies that use that definition. That sentence, rather than the two-trial rule, is the one that separates a current answer from a dated one: a candidate who offers only the failed-trial definition is answering the older guideline. The framework term governs the formulation and the narrower term governs the pharmacology, which is a division of labour rather than a change of mind, and the same logic explains why the resistant-schizophrenia material later in this chapter keeps its own vocabulary.

GOOD TO REMEMBER

The reframing changes the question asked at the review appointment. Resistance asks which agent has not yet been tried. Difficulty asks what is keeping this episode open, which returns the clinician to the five pre-label checks and to the contributors the reappraisal is meant to surface. Both questions are legitimate and only one of them can be answered by writing another prescription, so ask the second before the first.

Two failed adequate trials make the label; adequacy, adherence and a re-verified diagnosis are what make the label true.

7 · Switching, combination and augmentation strategies (lithium, atypical antipsychotics, thyroid)

A failed antidepressant trial forces a choice, not a new diagnosis. Once an adequate therapeutic dose has been given for an adequate duration, with optimisation considered against response and tolerability rather than pushed to the tolerability limit as a matter of routine, three structurally different manoeuvres are available: replace the drug, add a second antidepressant, or add something that is not an antidepressant at all. The marks sit on knowing that these are not interchangeable rungs of one ladder, that the order guidelines print them in is a sequence of decisions rather than a ranking the evidence supplies, and that almost every number attached to them belongs to one named body and is wrong under any other attribution. The definition and staging of resistance are taken up separately; what follows begins after resistance has been established.

7.1 The sequence, and what each rung actually is

The Indian 2025 guideline sets a six-step sequential ladder for **difficult-to-treat depression**, and it is the cleanest scaffold to answer from because it separates manoeuvres that an unstructured answer runs together.

- **Optimise** the current treatment: raise it to the maximum tolerated dose and monitor adverse reactions before concluding anything about response.
- **Switch** the antidepressant, choosing an agent with a different mechanism of action, such as an SSRI to an SNRI, or an SNRI to bupropion.
- **Augment**: add an agent that is not itself an antidepressant.
- **Combine**: add a second antidepressant from a different class, and the guideline attaches the words with caution to this rung specifically.
- **Neuromodulate**, with electroconvulsive therapy for severe and suicidal presentations; the modalities are taught in their own sections here.
- **Novel agents**, which is where the glutamatergic drugs sit; it has its own section here.

Two distinctions inside that list are examined more often than the list itself. **Augmentation** means adding an agent from outside the antidepressant classes, so the antidepressant continues

unchanged and the added agent works through a different mechanism. Combination means running two antidepressants together. The clinical consequence differs: an augmenting agent imports a new adverse-effect class and a new monitoring requirement, whereas a second antidepressant mostly intensifies pharmacology the patient already has, and with serotonergic pairs it raises the serotonin syndrome question taken up elsewhere here. The receptor pharmacology of each individual agent belongs to the Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes.

MNEMONIC

Optimise, Switch, Augment, Combine, Neuromodulate, Novel

The six rungs in order. The first is the one candidates skip and the one that costs the mark: a trial at a subtherapeutic or otherwise inadequate dose has not failed, and the sequence does not begin until it has. Submaximal and subtherapeutic are not the same word. Many adequate trials run at a therapeutic dose below the maximum the patient could tolerate, so optimisation is a separate decision taken on response and tolerability, which is why the guideline gives it a rung of its own rather than folding it into the definition of failure.

7.2 Switching, and why its evidence is thinner than its position

Switching is the second rung in the Indian 2025 sequence and appears early in many algorithms, which invites the assumption that it is the best-supported second move. It is not. In STAR*D level 2, patients switched to another agent after citalopram failure reached HRSD-17 remission in similar proportions whichever agent they were given, with the difference between the three falling short of significance.

21.3%	17.6%	24.8%
SWITCH TO BUPROPION-SR	SWITCH TO SERTRALINE	SWITCH TO VENLAFAXINE-XR

The add-on arm of the same programme is examined nearly as often, and one point of nomenclature has to be settled before its numbers mean anything. STAR*D called both add-on strategies augmentation; under the taxonomy this chapter takes from the Indian guideline, adding bupropion is antidepressant combination and only adding buspirone is augmentation. Trivedi and colleagues, reporting that arm in the New England Journal of Medicine in 2006, record HRSD-17 remission of 29.7 percent with added sustained-release bupropion and 30.1 percent with added buspirone, and a lower dropout rate due to intolerance with bupropion, 12.5 percent against 20.6 percent. Both of those comparisons live inside the add-on cohort. That cohort was never randomised against the switch cohort, so no switch-versus-augmentation inference can be drawn from the two together: the numbers sit side by side because the programme ran both, not because anyone compared them, and an answer that reads the higher add-on figure as evidence that adding beats switching has overreached. The tolerability advantage is narrower still, belonging to bupropion against buspirone within the add-on comparison and saying nothing whatever about switching.

The harder counterweight comes from meta-analysis, which found no high-level evidence that switching the antidepressant is superior to simply **continuing the initial antidepressant**. That comparator is the one switching trials usually omit, and it matters because time alone produces response: a patient re-rated after a switch has had more treatment as well as a new drug, and designs that separate the two are rare.

RULE **The order of the ladder is a sequence of decisions, not a ranking of evidence.** The Indian ladder places switching early because it preserves monotherapy and avoids concurrent polypharmacy, not because it works better. That is not the same as costing nothing: switching carries its own discontinuation, interaction and new-drug adverse effects, so the trade is one adverse-effect burden for another rather than a burden avoided. Nor does the evidence supply a general ranking to put in the order's place. Comparative efficacy between switching, combining and augmenting is specific to the agents and the trial, and a candidate who can say why the order and the evidence part company, without inventing a hierarchy to replace the one they have just dismantled, has understood the topic.

7.3 Combination: which pairing earns the term

Combination carries a quantified benefit over monotherapy, and the population it was quantified in has to travel with it: the analysis is of acute depression, including but not confined to patients who had already failed a trial, so it does not establish combination as the best strategy in treatment-resistant depression specifically. A meta-analysis of 39 RCTs including 6,751 patients found combining antidepressants superior to **monotherapy**, with a standardised mean difference of 0.31. That benefit was unevenly spread across the pairings. Combinations built on a **presynaptic alpha-2 autoreceptor antagonist** were superior to other combinations, at 0.37. Bupropion combinations were not superior to monotherapy. A complementary autoreceptor mechanism is the proposed explanation for that split, and it is worth being able to state: blocking the presynaptic autoreceptor lifts the negative feedback that damps monoamine firing, which is a different lever from the one a reuptake inhibitor pulls. What the analysis actually demonstrates is an association by combination class. It does not test that mechanism, and the result is not a reason to say that bupropion merely duplicates the pharmacology of the drug it is added to. The same analysis carried an indication of publication bias, and an answer that quotes the effect size without that caveat is quoting half of it.

The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines place the practical pairings in their tier of commonly used treatments, generally well supported by published literature. What that tier prints for treatment-resistant depression is a comparative list, not one regimen: three add-ons across two backbones, with no starting dose stated for any of them. An SSRI plus bupropion is entered as up to 400 mg/day, a ceiling and not a start, and the same evidence tier records that bupropion is not licensed for depression in the United Kingdom. Mianserin added to an SSRI or venlafaxine backbone in resistant depression is a flat figure, 30 mg/day, and the disadvantage recorded against it in the same evidence table is a risk of blood dyscrasia. Mirtazapine on those same backbones, again for resistant depression, is 30 to 45 mg/day, and one randomised trial showed no advantage for mirtazapine added to an SSRI or SNRI. Both autoreceptor pairings carry a theoretical risk of serotonin syndrome that the patient is to be informed of.

7.4 Lithium augmentation, and the number no Indian source states

Lithium is the drug primarily used as an **adjunct** in treatment-resistant depression according to the Indian 2017 guideline, which reports it useful in over 50 percent of antidepressant non-responders and usually well tolerated. Its most examinable feature is the latency: the interval before full response to adjunctive lithium is reported as **several days to 3 weeks**. That figure decides when a trial of the addition may fairly be called a failure, and it is strikingly short beside the antidepressant trial that preceded it.

No serum lithium target for antidepressant augmentation is carried by the Indian guidance these notes rest on, so the bands below belong to the bodies that state them. For lithium augmentation of an antidepressant the Maudsley target is a plasma level of **0.4 to 0.8 mmol/L** initially, increasing to up to 1.0 mmol/L if the response is suboptimal, and the same entry records plasma level monitoring as essential. NICE, for lithium used to augment antidepressant medication, states that plasma lithium levels should not exceed 1.0 mmol/L, that therapeutic levels for that purpose are usually at or above 0.4 mmol/L, and that levels of 0.4 to 0.6 mmol/L should be considered for older people aged 65 or above. The two are not the same kind of statement. The Maudsley gives a band to aim at. NICE gives a ceiling, and its lower figure is a usual practice rather than a floor: augmentation levels are usually, not invariably, at or above 0.4 mmol/L, so a level below it is not thereby declared subtherapeutic.

TRAP **Putting an Indian attribution on a lithium augmentation target.** The Indian guidance names lithium as the adjunct of first choice and states no serum level for that indication, so a level quoted under an Indian guideline's name is a fabricated citation even when the digits happen to be right. This is a different failure from quoting the wrong figure, and harder to spot: the number survives a memory check while the source does not. Quote the body that states the level, by name, in the same sentence as the level.

IN INDIA

The Indian guidance is the better scaffold and the thinner source of numbers, and the practical decision follows from that split. Take the sequence from the Indian ladder, which puts optimisation before switching and names lithium, thyroid hormone or an atypical antipsychotic as the augmenting options with the greatest evidence for lithium and aripiprazole; take the level, the dose and the monitoring interval from whichever body states them, and name that body in the same breath. Among the Indian figures in this section, the short latency reported for adjunctive lithium is the one that changes bedside behaviour most directly, because it fixes how long to hold the addition before judging it.

7.5 Thyroid hormone: one agent, two doses, two bodies

Tri-iodothyronine is the preparation used for this purpose rather than levothyroxine, and it is given to patients who are already **euthyroid**, which is what makes it counter-intuitive at the bedside and durable in vivas. The rationale is not replacement of a deficiency but potentiation of an incomplete antidepressant response, which is why thyroid function is followed as a safety measure rather than as the endpoint being treated. The Maudsley files it a tier below lithium,

aripiprazole and quetiapine, among less commonly used treatments that are nonetheless well supported by published evidence.

The two doses in circulation are genuinely different instructions from different bodies. The Indian 2017 guideline gives thyroid hormone augmentation of an antidepressant, even in euthyroid patients, at **25 micrograms/day** of tri-iodothyronine increased to 50 micrograms/day after a week. The Maudsley guidelines give tri-iodothyronine augmentation of an antidepressant at 20 to 50 micrograms/day, note that higher doses have been used safely, and require clinical and biochemical thyroid function monitoring alongside. The upper figures coincide; the starting point and the shape of the instruction do not. Neither body states a maximum for tri-iodothyronine. The Indian guideline gives a start and a step and stops there, with no ceiling named above either. The Maudsley tri-iodothyronine entry travels in the opposite direction, recording that higher doses have been used safely, which is the reverse of naming a limit, and it gives no starting dose at all, only the band inside which the prescriber chooses. So the figure the two documents share is where two instructions happen to meet, and not a ceiling either of them has set.

TRAP **Printing one tri-iodothyronine dose as the tri-iodothyronine dose.** The Indian figure is a titration with a fixed start and a fixed step at a fixed interval; the United Kingdom figure is a range within which the clinician chooses, with an explicit note that higher doses have been used safely. Writing only the range drops the Indian instruction; writing only the start and the step drops the range and that note. Write both, name the body against each, and never average them into a single band that neither source states.

7.6 Atypical antipsychotic augmentation: agent, dose and the trade it buys

This is the strategy modern guidelines lean on hardest. **Atypical antipsychotic** augmentation is named in the Indian ladder beside lithium and thyroid hormone, with the greatest evidence available for lithium and aripiprazole. The Indian text names the agent and states no dose, so the doses that follow are the Maudsley's.

Aripiprazole augmentation of an antidepressant is used at **2 to 20 mg/day**, with low doses of 2 to 10 mg/day potentially effective, and akathisia and restlessness common at standard doses of 10 mg/day or more, insomnia being the other effect that may become problematic. Quetiapine augmentation of a depressive illness is used at 150 mg or 300 mg a day added to an SSRI or SNRI, an option the Maudsley credits with a good evidence base and usual good tolerability, set against dry mouth, sedation and constipation as the problematic effects and weight gain as the longer-term risk. The olanzapine and fluoxetine combination for depression is used at 6.25 to 12.5 mg olanzapine plus 25 to 50 mg fluoxetine daily, which is the United States licensed dose; where combination formulations are not available, the Maudsley footnote says 5 mg plus 20 mg rising to 10 mg plus 40 mg seems reasonable, which is the line that matters wherever the fixed-dose product is absent.

None of those three entries is a complete prescribing instruction, and it is worth saying so beside the figures rather than leaving a reader to notice. The aripiprazole entry records the effective low

range and the dose at which akathisia becomes common, and no dose to begin at. The quetiapine entry records the two amounts used in augmentation, with no starting dose below them and no maximum above them. The olanzapine and fluoxetine entry records a licensed range and an alternative for units without the fixed-dose product, with no starting dose for the licensed range and no ceiling stated for that combination at all; the alternative does carry a start, since it is written as a titration. Its upper pair is what the licence permits, which is not the same statement as a limit the guideline has set. Read all three as the amounts these table rows record, and no further.

CANMAT 2023 sharpens the choice inside the class, listing aripiprazole and brexpiprazole as first-line adjuncts for difficult-to-treat depression on efficacy and tolerability, with cariprazine second-line because there are fewer studies of it. Whether brexpiprazole and cariprazine are approved and marketed here, and at which strengths, is not something the sources behind these notes establish, and the same is true of the marketed strength of tri-iodothyronine.

GOOD TO REMEMBER

Start aripiprazole augmentation at the bottom of its range and give it time before moving up. Akathisia and restlessness belong to the standard doses rather than the low ones, so a patient who becomes agitated and unable to settle a few days after the addition is more likely to be akathisic than more depressed. The reflex is to read the agitation as worsening illness and push the dose, which makes both problems worse.

7.7 Reading the guideline bodies against each other

Four bodies are quotable on augmentation and they do not carry the same agents at the same strength. BAP 2015 grades first-line augmentation as quetiapine, aripiprazole or lithium, each at grade A, and second-line as risperidone at grade A with olanzapine, tri-iodothyronine and mirtazapine at grade B. The caveat printed with those grades is the teaching point and is regularly dropped: the evidence derives mainly from studies in which lithium and tri-iodothyronine were added to tricyclics, and the other drugs were added to SSRIs or SNRIs. A grade A for lithium is therefore a grade A earned in a prescribing context that has largely gone.

AGENT	POSITION IN THE GRADED BRITISH LIST	NAMED IN THE INDIAN LADDER	WHERE A PRINTABLE DOSE OR LEVEL COMES FROM
Lithium	First-line, grade A	Named, and one of the two agents of greatest evidence	The Maudsley and NICE, as a plasma level rather than a dose
Aripiprazole	First-line, grade A	Named, and the other agent of greatest evidence	The Maudsley
Quetiapine	First-line, grade A	Covered by the atypical antipsychotic option, not named	The Maudsley

AGENT	POSITION IN THE GRADED BRITISH LIST	NAMED IN THE INDIAN LADDER	WHERE A PRINTABLE DOSE OR LEVEL COMES FROM
Risperidone	Second-line, grade A	Covered by the atypical antipsychotic option, not named	No dose is stated
Olanzapine	Second-line, grade B	Covered by the atypical antipsychotic option, not named	The Maudsley, only in combination with fluoxetine
Tri-iodothyronine	Second-line, grade B	Named, as thyroid hormone	The earlier Indian guideline and the Maudsley, and they differ
Mirtazapine	Second-line, grade B	Not an augmenting agent there; it is a combination partner	The Maudsley
Brexpiprazole	Not among the graded agents	Not named	The Canadian list, as a first-line adjunct, with no dose stated
Cariprazine	Not among the graded agents	Not named	The Canadian list, as a second-line adjunct, with no dose stated

Read down the third column and the Indian position becomes legible: it names a class where the other lists name molecules, a deliberate looseness written to survive a formulary that varies between institutions. The cost is that the Indian document cannot be quoted for a dose.

7.8 Monitoring what you have added

Every augmenting agent brings its own surveillance, and the schedules are the part of this topic a written answer most often omits. For lithium used to augment antidepressant medication, NICE assesses weight, renal and thyroid function and calcium levels before treatment and then monitors at least every 6 months during treatment. CANMAT 2023 states that when adjunctive agents are used, laboratory tests tailored to the specific medication should be monitored, and gives as its worked example that patients taking lithium should have lithium levels, electrolytes, calcium, creatinine, eGFR and TSH checked at baseline and every 6 to 12 months thereafter, or whenever the clinical status or the lithium dose changes. Quote that interval with a caveat attached. Neither this monitoring sentence nor the adjunct ranking taken from the same update could be located in the copy used for these notes, so the six to twelve month figure is unverified here and the NICE schedule is the one to rely on until it is confirmed.

Those are two different instructions from two bodies and neither is offered here as the resolution of the other. They also do not cover quite the same thing, and that is the part most easily mishandled. NICE sets a separate and more frequent schedule for the serum lithium levels themselves during the first year of treatment; the intervals in that schedule are not carried by these notes, and it would understate NICE to present its six-monthly panel as its instruction for

lithium levels in the first year. Say the two bodies disagree, give each figure with its body, and be explicit that the British level-monitoring schedule is tighter than the panel interval implies.

For an antipsychotic used to treat depression, NICE directs that monitoring is carried out as indicated in the summary of product characteristics for the individual medicine, and says this may include monitoring weight weekly for the first 6 weeks, then at 12 weeks, at 1 year and annually, and monitoring fasting blood glucose or HbA1c and fasting lipids at 12 weeks, at 1 year and then annually. Read the modal exactly. The schedule is offered as what product-specific monitoring may include, not as a schedule the guideline itself specifies, and an answer that presents it as a fixed requirement has silently upgraded the strength of the recommendation. Tri-iodothyronine augmentation carries its own requirement, since the Maudsley requires clinical and biochemical thyroid function monitoring for it. The wider cardiometabolic and QT surveillance that spans the psychotropics is taught in its own section here.

PITFALL

Adding quetiapine or olanzapine to an antidepressant and filing the metabolic monitoring under something that only applies to psychosis. The augmenting antipsychotic is prescribed by the clinician who has been treating a depressive illness, often in a setting that has never taken a baseline weight or a fasting glucose, and the weight gain listed as the longer-term risk accrues while nobody is measuring it. The companion instruction is to check baseline pulse and blood pressure, weight, nutritional status, diet, level of physical activity, fasting blood glucose or HbA1c and fasting lipids before the antipsychotic is started, not at the first review.

Optimise before you move: switching preserves monotherapy but brings its own discontinuation and new-drug risks and has no high-level evidence of superiority over simply continuing, the comparison between the three manoeuvres is specific to the agents and the trial rather than a general ranking, and every level, dose and monitoring interval you quote belongs to a named body and must travel with its name.

8 · Ketamine and esketamine in treatment-resistant depression (cross-reference to recent advances)

Glutamate arrived late in the antidepressant story and changed the timescale. Ketamine and its S-enantiomer esketamine are the worked example of what a resistant depressive episode does to prescribing. Here is an agent whose effect is measured in hours rather than in weeks of waiting, whose route decides which evidence applies to it, whose durability is quantified for one formulation and merely described for the other, and whose delivery needs a monitored chair rather than a prescription pad. The marks sit on route, eligibility, monitoring and durability, and candidates lose them by treating ketamine and esketamine as one drug with one dose. The receptor pharmacology of glutamatergic agents as a drug class belongs to the Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes; what follows is the decision that has to be made once two adequate antidepressant trials have failed.

8.1 Where the glutamatergic agents enter, and who is eligible

The 2025 Indian Psychiatric Society depression guideline puts novel agents, naming ketamine and esketamine alongside dextromethorphan-bupropion, in the last row of its sequential intervention table for **difficult-to-treat depression**, qualified "wherever available" and annotated "Limited long-term data" in the notes column. The position in the table is itself the teaching. Within that Indian table these agents come after the conventional optimisation, switching, augmentation and combination strategies and after neuromodulation, each of which is a topic in its own right; and the recommendation is conditioned on supply rather than asserting that the agents can be obtained. The ordering belongs to this guideline rather than to the field: the Canadian guidance in the next paragraph puts the same agents earlier, so an answer should name the body whose sequence it is describing.

The Canadian guidance shows how quickly the position moved, and the direction of travel is examinable. CANMAT in 2016 considered ketamine an experimental treatment and recommended that its use be limited to academic depression treatment centres, its adjunctive-agent table listing ketamine as Experimental, Level 1 evidence, at 0.5 mg/kg as a single intravenous dose for acute treatment. By 2023 the same body recommended adjunctive ketamine and intranasal esketamine at second line, which is an advance on the experimental status of 2016 and not a retreat from it. CANMAT's own verb is downgraded, but what it downgrades is the placement the efficacy evidence alone would have supported, and the stated reason is worth memorising because it is not loss of efficacy: side effect potential and feasibility issues, specifically the required monitoring of blood pressure and dissociative side effects. The same update pushed the alternate routes of racemic ketamine, oral, nasal and intramuscular, down to third-line, given highly variable protocols and mixed results. That the second-line agent is the intravenous racemic route is a reading derived from the surrounding paragraph rather than a phrase the guideline itself prints.

Eligibility is defined most precisely not by a guideline but by a licence. The Summary of Product Characteristics for esketamine nasal spray indicates it, in combination with an SSRI or SNRI, for adults with treatment-resistant major depressive disorder who have not responded to at least two different antidepressant treatments in the current moderate to severe depressive episode. Read the three constraints together: the failures must be to antidepressant treatments, they must lie inside the current episode, and that episode must be moderate to severe. This is the eligibility criterion written into one product's licence, and it is not the same thing as the general definition and staging of treatment resistance, which is a separate construct.

8.2 Mechanism, and the shape of the acute effect

Ketamine is an antagonist at the NMDA glutamate receptor, and esketamine is its S-enantiomer formulated as a nasal spray. The prevailing account of the antidepressant action is not the block itself but what follows it: preferential action on inhibitory interneurons is thought to disinhibit pyramidal output, producing a brief rise in glutamate that acts at AMPA receptors and drives a rapid strengthening of synaptic connections in prefrontal circuits. That account is a hypothesis

under active revision, not a settled mechanism, and an answer that states it as established has overreached. What is not in doubt is the clinical shape of the effect.

The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines, describing the first controlled trial, record that a single **subanaesthetic** intravenous infusion of ketamine at 0.5 mg/kg produced an antidepressant effect within hours, and that the effect increased progressively up to 3 days after administration. Two consequences follow for practice. The peak does not fall at the end of the infusion, so a patient written off as a non-responder in the recovery chair may have been judged too early; and a benefit that builds over days is a different phenomenon from the dissociative experience of the infusion hour, which is why examiners like the distinction between the psychotomimetic and the therapeutic effect.

RULE **Ketamine and esketamine are not one treatment, and the route is what decides the evidence.** Molecule, enantiomer, route, licence and monitoring requirement travel together as a single package. A statement about an intravenous racemic infusion does not transfer to a nasal spray, and the guideline bodies grade the routes separately for precisely that reason.

8.3 Route and formulation: two standard sources, one drug, different numbers

Route is where most of the examinable detail sits, and it is also where the two texts on an Indian shelf disagree without either being wrong. The rule for an answer is to print both, attributed, and never to split the difference. Note as you read the table that the Indian document supplies figures for routes it simultaneously declines to endorse, and that **racemic ketamine** and esketamine are graded separately at every step.

ROUTE	INDIAN PSYCHIATRIC SOCIETY DEPRESSION GUIDELINE, 2025	MAUDSLEY PRESCRIBING GUIDELINES, TREATMENT-RESISTANT DEPRESSION
Intravenous racemic ketamine	0.5 to 1.0 mg/kg, infused over 40 to 60 minutes, twice weekly for 2 weeks in the acute course	**0.5 mg/kg over 40 minutes**, named the gold standard for off-label ketamine administration, with the best supporting evidence for efficacy, and possibly more effective than intranasal administration
Oral ketamine	2 to 3 mg/kg, mixed with around 100 mL of purified water and sipped over 10 to 15 minutes for the first session, with the available evidence called preliminary and currently insufficient to support routine clinical use	0.5 to 1.25 mg/kg, effective but with no licensed products
Sublingual ketamine	Not established, with a suggested start at 10 mg placed under the tongue and held for 2 minutes without swallowing	Oral or sublingual doses considered between intravenous treatments
Intranasal esketamine	56 to 84 mg twice weekly for 4 weeks of induction	28 to 84 mg, licensed in most countries, where the oral evidence above has no licensed product
Intranasal racemic ketamine	50 to 150 mg twice weekly	No separate figure in the treatment-resistant depression table

Two disagreements inside that table are examinable in their own right. The first is infusion duration: the Indian range is wider at its upper end than the single British figure, and the British figure is also the duration used in the controlled trial that text describes. The range contains the point, so the two are compatible at the bedside and not interchangeable in an answer. Name the body you are quoting and give its own figure.

Something else is true of every cell in that table, and it is easy to miss because the cells look finished. No cell in it states a maximum. For ketamine, intravenous, oral or sublingual, and for esketamine by the intranasal route, the Indian guideline gives an amount and either a vehicle or an infusion time, and then stops, with no ceiling named for any of them. Nor does every row carry a frequency, and the rows differ on that point in a way the layout hides. The intravenous and intranasal rows state twice weekly. The oral row describes the first session only, with no interval between sessions and no course length. The sublingual row states neither, and its two minutes is how long the dose is held under the tongue rather than how often it is given, which is the likeliest cell here to be misread as a schedule. The Maudsley gives the intravenous ketamine figure it calls the gold standard and states no limit above it, and no interval between infusions either. Only the sublingual ketamine row is written as somewhere to start, and its own source calls that route not established while suggesting the figure; for every other ketamine and esketamine cell here there is no starting dose, because the figure recorded is the amount to give

rather than the first step of a titration. So the number a reader meets in any of these cells is what the source recorded for that route, and not the top of a permitted range.

TRAP **Averaging the two published oral ketamine doses.** For depression the Maudsley gives oral ketamine at 0.5 to 1.25 mg/kg, calling it effective on that evidence while recording that no licensed oral product exists, and the Indian guideline gives 2 to 3 mg/kg, a several-fold separation for one route in one indication. Neither is a misprint and no average exists between them: they rest on different literatures, and the Indian guideline attaches to its own figure the statement that the evidence for oral ketamine is preliminary and currently insufficient to support routine clinical use. A candidate who writes a single oral range has silently chosen a source and hidden the choice.

8.4 The esketamine schedule, and the second licensed indication

Esketamine is the one formulation with a fixed published schedule rather than a range, and it is the one most often reproduced wrongly, because the frequency steps down twice. In adults under 65 with treatment-resistant depression the label sets **56 mg on the first day, then 56 mg or 84 mg twice a week through the first four weeks**, the same dose once weekly through the fifth to eighth weeks, and from the ninth week onward the same dose either once every two weeks or once weekly. Three phases, two step-downs, one dose pair throughout: that is the whole table, and it is easier held as a shape than as a grid. The esketamine label sets no maximum above that pair. Its higher figure is a maintenance dose that recurs at every phase, so treating it as the licensed ceiling reads a schedule as a limit, which the schedule does not say.

The label attaches a durability instruction to that schedule. After depressive symptoms improve, treatment is recommended for **at least 6 months**. It is the instruction most often dropped by an answer that has carefully memorised the induction phase and stopped there.

There is a second licence, and it is not for resistance. Esketamine is also licensed for the acute short-term treatment of depressive symptoms constituting a psychiatric emergency, co-administered with oral antidepressant therapy, and for that indication the recommended dosage in adults under 65 is 84 mg, the maximum the label recommends for this indication, given twice per week for 4 weeks, with reduction to 56 mg made on tolerability. The two indications differ in more than the number. The emergency indication opens at the higher of the two doses and comes down if the patient cannot tolerate it, whereas the resistance indication opens lower and may go up; a stem that gives you the entry dose has already told you which licence it is testing. Note the shape of the emergency esketamine entry too. It records the dose for that indication and no starting dose beneath it, so the reduction it describes is a response to tolerability and not the second rung of a titration.

8.5 Durability: quantified for one formulation, described for the other

This is the discriminating section of the topic, and the asymmetry in it is uncomfortable: the strong maintenance evidence belongs to intranasal esketamine, whose Indian availability is unverified here, while the intravenous racemic infusion has no equivalent relapse-prevention trial. Which of the two a given service can actually deliver is a local question, to be established rather than assumed.

For racemic ketamine the Indian guideline describes an acute course of six to eight infusions, given twice or three times weekly, and states that continuation and maintenance ketamine may be given at an individualised frequency but that most of the evidence along those lines is anecdotal. Its own route table, printed above, describes that acute course differently, as twice weekly for 2 weeks. The two do not reconcile, and both are in the same document, so the honest answer names both rather than choosing between them. The Maudsley schedule is compatible with that and equally unquantified: an **induction phase** of once or twice a week, then a maintenance phase, according to response, of weekly, then every 2 weeks or even monthly, with oral or sublingual doses considered between the infusions.

Esketamine has the evidence the racemic infusion lacks. In SUSTAIN-1, a **randomised withdrawal** trial, continuing esketamine nasal spray with an oral antidepressant reduced relapse risk by 51 percent in patients who had achieved stable remission and by 70 percent in those who had achieved stable response. The design is the point as much as the result: patients were stabilised first and then randomised to continue or to stop, so what the trial measures is the value of not stopping.

0.49	6	0.30	4
HAZARD RATIO, STABLE REMITTERS	NUMBER NEEDED TO TREAT, REMITTERS	HAZARD RATIO, STABLE RESPONDERS	NUMBER NEEDED TO TREAT, RESPONDERS

The head-to-head comparison points the same way. In ESCAPE-TRD, esketamine nasal spray was superior to extended-release quetiapine, each added to an SSRI or SNRI, for remission at 8 weeks, reached by 27.1 percent against 17.6 percent, and for remission at that point sustained without relapse through 32 weeks, achieved by 21.7 percent against 14.1 percent. Two design features reported with the trial should travel with those figures whenever they are quoted: the comparison was open-label with the raters kept unaware of allocation, and patients who discontinued were counted as having an unfavourable outcome.

TRAP **Carrying the esketamine relapse figures across to racemic ketamine.** The hazard ratios and numbers needed to treat above belong to intranasal esketamine continued alongside an oral antidepressant in a randomised withdrawal design. No comparable maintenance trial of the intravenous racemic infusion with a relapse endpoint is available to this account, and the Indian guideline itself calls the continuation evidence anecdotal. The defensible sentence is that durability is quantified for esketamine and described only qualitatively for racemic ketamine, and a candidate who transfers a hazard ratio between them has invented a result.

8.6 What has to be in place before, during and after a session

This is where the modality stops being a prescription and becomes a service, and it is the part an answer built only from dose tables leaves out. Before administration the Maudsley recommends a physical examination including baseline blood pressure, full blood count, liver function test, thyroid function test and an electrocardiogram, with blood pressure and heart rate monitored during and after administration.

During and after the session the two standard sources set different clocks, and both are examinable. The Indian guideline describes continuous monitoring of consciousness, heart rate,

blood pressure, respiratory rate and oxygen saturation at baseline and periodically, offering every 15 minutes as its own example, throughout the session and continuing for up to **2 to 3 hours** after the session ends. The Maudsley, for racemic ketamine, has the patient observed by a trained clinician during dosing and for 1 hour after administration. For an Indian examination the Indian figure governs and the British one is quoted as the comparator; the two were set by different bodies and must not be averaged into a third period that neither recommends.

PITFALL

Treating the observation period as a courtesy rather than a competence requirement. Ketamine given at antidepressant doses causes significant **dissociative symptoms**, so patients must be observed by a trained clinician, and because **laryngospasm** has been reported the observing clinician should be trained in intermediate or advanced life support. Being able to obtain the drug is therefore not the same thing as being able to give it.

Esketamine carries its own haemodynamic clock. Its label records transient rises in systolic and diastolic blood pressure that peak at approximately 40 minutes after administration and last approximately 1 to 2 hours, and it times the post-dose reassessment of blood pressure to that same 40 minute point. That single figure explains the shape of the whole session: the reassessment is set against the expected peak, not against the end of the dose. For patients kept on longer-term ketamine or esketamine treatment the Canadian guidance adds periodic urinalysis to check for cystitis, a potential long-term adverse effect of ketamine use, which is the one piece of monitoring that outlives the session itself.

8.7 The Indian position: a controlled drug and a cheap route the guideline will not endorse

Ketamine is a **controlled drug** in India, so the prescribing, storage and record-keeping frame is statutory before it is clinical, and that is a fact about the drug rather than about any one hospital. Which instrument and which schedule govern it is a separate question, and the sources read here do not settle it, so this account prints no schedule number. The one Indian paper read here calls ketamine a Schedule III controlled substance under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, but that is the schedule language of United States controlled-substances law rather than a schedule of the Indian Act; beside it sit a United Nations country listing recording ketamine's inclusion among the psychotropic substances under that Act, and secondary sources placing ketamine hydrochloride in Schedule X of the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules. The Gazette notification that would decide between them could not be consulted for this chapter. Carry the statutory obligation into an answer and leave the schedule number out of it.

Set against that is what one Indian source reports. A 2024 correspondence article in an Indian journal states that the administration of oral ketamine is prevalent in India because it is inexpensive and easy to administer in facilities with limited access to healthcare resources. The attribution has to stay visible, because that sentence is a correspondence article rather than a prevalence study, and no Indian prevalence figure or national register of ketamine use was found. The tension is still the examinable point: the cheapest and most deliverable route is precisely the

route the Indian guideline prints a dose for and then declines to endorse for routine use, and the route the Canadian guidance places third-line.

On availability the guideline is careful and an answer should be too. It lists these agents as novel agents "wherever available", which conditions the recommendation on supply rather than asserting it. In the same passage the same authors do assert Indian availability for something else, recording that **dextromethorphan-bupropion**, approved in the USA in 2022 for major depressive disorder, is now available in India. The contrast is deliberate and it is usable in an answer: these authors state availability when they mean it, and they did not state it for esketamine. No Indian regulatory or market status for intranasal esketamine is asserted by any source used here, and the correct examination answer names that absence rather than filling it.

IN INDIA

Where a unit can obtain the drug at all, the decision the sources support is to run the intravenous route in a setting that can meet the guideline's own monitoring description, and not to substitute the oral route merely because it is simpler: the Indian guideline prints an oral dose and in the same table refuses to endorse it for routine use. The pre-treatment workup the British text asks for should be in hand before the first dose wherever a service offers ketamine, and the local availability of those five investigations, along with the referral route for any the unit cannot do itself, is to be confirmed rather than assumed. And because the drug is controlled in India whichever instrument turns out to govern it, the record-keeping is part of the treatment plan rather than an afterthought to it.

8.8 Choosing between them, and what a complete answer contains

Reduced to four decisions, the topic becomes answerable in whatever form the question takes.

- Route decides the evidence: the intravenous racemic infusion carries the best efficacy data, the nasal spray the licence, the fixed schedule and the maintenance trial.
- Eligibility is drawn from a licence rather than an impression, and the licence counts failed antidepressant treatments inside the current moderate to severe episode.
- Monitoring, not the drug, is the rate-limiting step: a trained observer, a defined observation period, and for esketamine a reassessment timed to the pressure peak.
- Durability is a separate question from response, and it has a different quality of answer for each formulation.

GOOD TO REMEMBER

The commonest real-world error here is not a dosing error. It is offering the treatment in a room that cannot observe the patient afterwards. Where the post-dose observation period cannot be staffed, the honest position is that the service is not yet able to offer the treatment, rather than that the treatment is unsuitable for the patient.

MNEMONIC

Route, Evidence, Observation, Durability

The four axes on which every question about these agents separates: which route is asked about, whose evidence supports it, how long the patient is watched afterwards, and what happens to the gain once the acute course ends. A durability claim made without naming the formulation is a wrong one.

Route decides the evidence, the licence decides eligibility, and the observation period decides whether the treatment can be offered at all.

9 · Treatment-resistant schizophrenia and the role of clozapine

Treatment resistance is a verdict on the prescribing before it is a verdict on the patient. Almost all the marks in this topic sit on the entry condition rather than on what follows it: what a guideline demands before the label may be used at all, what makes a failed trial a genuine failure, and which of the ordinary explanations for apparent non-response has been left unexcluded. Once resistance is properly established the drug choice narrows sharply, and the examinable content shifts to exposure, to dose and to blood counts. The schizophrenia management algorithm itself, and the order in which agents are tried, belong to the Schizophrenia: management, antipsychotics and adverse effects notes; what follows here is the pharmacological reasoning that sits underneath that algorithm and decides whether it should ever have been entered.

9.1 What the label requires before it may be applied

The current Indian definition of **treatment-resistant schizophrenia** is a compound one, and every limb of it is doing work. The 2025 Indian Psychiatric Society schizophrenia guideline requires failure across **at least 2 adequate trials** of different antipsychotics; it requires **confirmed medication adherence**, established rather than assumed; and it requires that moderate or severe symptoms and psychosocial dysfunction both persist despite that treatment. The comparator is easy to lose in an answer. A floor of two is not a rule of two, and a candidate who writes that resistance is declared after exactly two trials has quietly converted a minimum into a maximum.

The adherence limb is the one most often skipped, and it is the one that changes what happens next. Adherence is not a historical detail collected for completeness; it is written into the definition as a precondition, so an unconfirmed adherence history means the definition has not been satisfied and the label cannot yet be applied. The third limb keeps the judgement clinical rather than symptomatic: residual symptoms do not qualify a patient whose function has recovered, because the guideline binds severity and functional cost together rather than accepting either alone.

RULE **Resistance is a conjunction, never a count.** A tally of failed trials establishes nothing by itself. The trials must have been adequate, the adherence must have been confirmed rather than presumed, and the residual illness must be both severe and functionally costly. Fail any one of those and what is in front of you is inadequately treated illness, which is a different clinical problem with a different answer.

9.2 What makes a trial adequate: dose, duration and the drug actually taken

An **adequate antipsychotic trial** has a floor written into Indian guidance rather than left to judgement. The earlier 2017 Indian Psychiatric Society schizophrenia guideline set the minimum for all antipsychotics as the highest tolerable dose sustained for **6 to 8 weeks**, and carved out one exception: for clozapine the minimum period of treatment is **at least 3 to 6 months**. Two variables are specified and both must be satisfied before a trial counts: the dose pushed to what the patient could actually tolerate, and that dose held long enough for a response to declare itself.

This is where most apparent resistance dissolves on questioning. A trial fails the definition, rather than the drug failing the patient, in four recognisable ways.

- The dose never reached the highest tolerable level, usually because a tolerable adverse effect was read as a ceiling and the titration stopped there.
- The duration fell short, the agent being switched at the point where the prescriber lost patience rather than at the point where the trial actually ended.
- The drug was not taken, in which case no trial occurred at any dose and over any interval, and the correct next step is not a new molecule.
- The drug was taken but the patient never achieved the exposure the dose implied, which looks identical to non-adherence at the bedside and separates from it only on measurement.

A failed trial belongs in the tally the definition asks for once adequate dose, adequate duration and confirmed adherence have been established. The fourth is not a precondition on every antipsychotic trial: it is what a measured level investigates, where monitoring is indicated and interpretable, chiefly clozapine. The clozapine exception is asymmetrical by design. The minimum for this one drug is several times the minimum that satisfies every other antipsychotic, and the guideline records it as an exception rather than as a preference.

TRAP **Applying the standard adequate-trial yardstick to clozapine.** A patient taken off clozapine at the point where any other antipsychotic would fairly have been abandoned has not had a clozapine trial at all and cannot be described as having failed one. The trap is attractive because the yardstick is correct for every other agent, and because notes recording the switch rarely record how long the drug ran.

9.3 Pseudoresistance, and what a measured level settles

A level converts a clinical impression into a measurement. Where a patient on clozapine fails to improve, the Indian Psychiatric Society schizophrenia guideline names **inadequate response** among the conditions under which **therapeutic drug monitoring** of clozapine is usually recommended, and it states what the measurement is for: to establish whether under-exposure

explains the failure before the patient is called clozapine-resistant. Read the modal as it is written. Usually recommended is not required, and an answer that upgrades the strength of a recommendation has misreported the guideline as surely as one that misquotes a number.

The reasoning this licenses is the pharmacological lens on this topic, and it is reasoning about exposure rather than a verdict on treatment. A concentration below the accepted band raises under-exposure, through under-dosing, rapid metabolism, enzyme induction or partial adherence, but the sampling time, the steady state, the adherence history, smoking, interacting drugs and any intercurrent inflammatory illness are checked before the dose is touched, and dose adjustment is one response among several. A concentration within the band documents exposure at the moment of sampling; adequacy still needs the duration, the adherence history and the clinical criteria before the failure can be attributed to the drug. A concentration at or near zero in a patient who is collecting prescriptions strongly raises covert non-adherence or interrupted exposure, once the timing and the validity of the assay have been checked. These readings can coexist, so the level narrows the differential and never settles it alone; it is read alongside the clinical assessment, not instead of it. The threshold itself, the sampling technique and the intervals that surround it are taught in the therapeutic drug monitoring material and are not restated here.

PITFALL

Writing "failed clozapine" into a discharge summary without recording the dose reached, the duration sustained, or whether exposure was ever measured. The next prescriber inherits a closed door and no way to test whether it was ever locked. The guideline's sequence, measurement before label, cannot be run retrospectively on a note that omits the exposure.

9.4 Where clozapine enters, and how the entry condition changed

Indian guidance has stated the clozapine entry point twice, and the difference between the two statements is examinable in its own right. The earlier guideline held that clozapine need to be considered after the failure of sequential trials with 2 antipsychotics, at least one of them a second-generation agent. The current definition of resistance drops the class requirement altogether: what it asks for is failure across adequate trials of different antipsychotics with adherence confirmed, and it names no class anywhere. Reciting the second-generation requirement as current Indian practice is therefore an error of vintage rather than of fact, and a well-read candidate is likelier to make it than a poorly read one.

The modal in the earlier wording repays attention too. Clozapine need to be considered is an instruction to consider, which is what a guideline says when the decision is still the clinician's. The current guideline is stronger: its recommendation tables direct a switch to clozapine after at least two failed adequate trials, a direction that contraindications, tolerability and the patient's own decision still qualify. The pharmacological argument for moving early rests on the alternatives rather than on the guideline strength: once two adequate trials of different agents have failed, the probability that a third agent from the same broad pharmacological space will succeed is not what drives the decision, and clozapine is the option with a distinct claim on that

ground. The evidence-ranked ladder of what may be added to or substituted for an antipsychotic, and the switch-versus-combine-versus-augment decision itself, are taught under the switching, combination and augmentation strategies.

9.5 Dose is not exposure, and the Indian patient needs less of it

The dose written on the card and the concentration the patient achieves are different quantities, and the gap between them is populated by identifiable variables rather than by noise. The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines record that clozapine plasma levels run lower in younger patients, in males and in smokers, and higher in Asians, and they state the practical consequence directly: markedly lower clozapine doses are required in East Asians, Indians and Bangladeshis. That is a statement about the patients in front of this reader, not a footnote about somebody else's population. The kinetic principles that generate the variability, and the cytochrome map that underlies most of it, belong to the Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes.

No Indian milligram figure follows from that observation, and none should be manufactured to fill the space; the source gives a direction of effect and nothing more. The nearest dose anchor available is regional rather than Indian. The Malaysian Ministry of Health schizophrenia guideline starts clozapine at 12.5 mg/day, gives a target dose of 300 to 900 mg/day in twice-daily divided doses, and has a serum level checked for doses above 600 mg/day. Quote that range to its own source. Attributing it to Indian guidance would be a fabrication of provenance, which the reader cannot detect and which no digit check would catch.

IN INDIA

Start lower and climb more slowly than a Western dose table implies. If markedly lower clozapine doses are required in Indian patients, then the same milligram is delivering a higher exposure here than in the populations the published dose ranges were derived in, so the titration should be driven by the response and by dose-related adverse effects rather than by arrival at a printed target dose. If you are titrating without a measured level, that is a reason to move more cautiously: response and tolerability guide the dose, but the exposure itself stays unknown until a valid level is taken, and an unmeasured patient is never a reason to move faster towards the top of a range that was not built on this population.

9.6 What the blood monitoring is actually buying

The obligation that travels with clozapine is haematological, and its size is worth knowing precisely, because candidates habitually overstate it while patients most often refuse the monitoring burden. The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines put the risk of **agranulocytosis** during clozapine treatment at **1 in 250**, or 0.4 percent, describing that figure as lower than previously thought, and put the risk of death resulting from it, in that same treated population, at 0.05 percent. Around 3.8 percent of patients treated with clozapine develop neutropenia.

1 in 250	0.05%	3.8%
AGRANULOCYTOSIS	FATAL AGRANULOCYTOSIS	NEUTROPENIA

Three figures, three different events, and they are routinely merged into one in an answer. Neutropenia and agranulocytosis are not the same finding and do not carry the same rate; the larger is not a softer statement of the smaller. All three are risks in the treated population, and the third is the one most often misread: fatal agranulocytosis occurs in about 0.05 percent of clozapine-treated patients, and that is not the proportion of those who develop agranulocytosis who die of it. Attaching the figure to the smaller denominator changes what it says. Getting the relation right is worth more than reciting any single value; it is what one follow-up question tests.

The phrase the Maudsley attaches to the agranulocytosis figure, lower than previously thought, is itself examinable: it is a revision of an estimate, not a revision of the monitoring requirement. The requirement itself is set by the guideline bodies, and they do not agree with each other.

9.7 Two blood-monitoring schedules, and where they part

The Indian and United Kingdom schedules open identically and then diverge, which is precisely why one gets substituted for the other without the writer noticing. Indian guidance runs the full blood count and absolute neutrophil count weekly through the first 18 weeks, then monthly for 2 years, then annually, and adds C-reactive protein weekly for a further 4 weeks. United Kingdom practice, as the Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines set it out, runs weekly for the same first 18 weeks, then every 2 weeks to the end of the first year, and usually monthly thereafter.

PHASE OF TREATMENT	INDIAN PSYCHIATRIC SOCIETY SCHIZOPHRENIA GUIDELINE	UNITED KINGDOM PRACTICE, AS THE MAUDSLEY PRESCRIBING GUIDELINES GIVE IT
Before the first dose	Full blood count and absolute neutrophil count, plus C-reactive protein	Full blood count and absolute neutrophil count
Opening stretch	Weekly counts through the first 18 weeks	Weekly counts through the first 18 weeks
Immediately after that stretch	Monthly counts, sustained for the next 2 years	Counts every 2 weeks to the end of the first year
Long term	Annual counts	Usually monthly, with no annual endpoint stated
Inflammatory marker	C-reactive protein at baseline, then weekly for a further 4 weeks	Not part of this schedule

TRAP **Writing one clozapine blood-monitoring schedule as though there were only one.** The two agree for the opening stretch and then separate: Indian guidance steps straight to monthly and holds it for years before annual, while United Kingdom practice inserts a fortnightly phase to the end of the first year and states no annual endpoint. Either can be quoted, provided it is attributed to the body that issues it. Blending the two, or reciting the fortnightly phase in an Indian answer as though it were Indian, is the error, and the answer that names both and marks which is which scores above the answer that picks one and sounds certain.

9.8 When the count falls: lithium, ethnic neutropenia, and the bands this text will not print

A falling count is where the pharmacology of resistance meets the pharmacology of an adverse effect, and it is the point at which a second drug enters for a reason that has nothing to do with symptoms. The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines list lithium as indicated in patients on clozapine with a low initial white cell count, below 4 x10^9/L, or low initial neutrophils, below 2.5 x10^9/L; and in **leucopenia**, a white cell count below 3 x10^9/L, or a neutrophil count below 1.5 x10^9/L, where the finding is thought to be linked to **benign ethnic neutropenia**.

Two qualifiers on that list carry the weight. The second indication is governed entirely by the benign ethnic neutropenia clause and must never be quoted without it, because it applies where the low count is a constitutional trait rather than a drug effect. And these are values that trigger lithium, not general definitions of leucopenia and neutropenia; the source does not define those terms in this section, and lifting the figures out as definitions misstates what was written.

GOOD TO REMEMBER

Before accepting a handover that says clozapine was stopped for a low count, ask which count, at what value, and whether the patient has a constitutionally low baseline. A low starting count and a constitutional low count are recognised situations with their own management rather than automatically the same event as a fall on treatment, and a patient wrongly closed out of clozapine has lost the option the whole definition of resistance was leading towards.

What this account deliberately does not print is the traffic-light scheme. A green, amber and red banding of the white cell and neutrophil counts, with a defined action attached to each band, is what day-to-day practice actually runs on, and its numbers belong to the product information rather than to either textbook: the marketing authorisation holder's summary of product characteristics and, in India, the approved package insert. Nothing available here carries those bands with their actions attached, and a set of thresholds recalled from memory and printed with consequences beside them is exactly the kind of error that reaches a patient rather than an examiner. Read them off the insert that governs the brand in your own pharmacy, and be suspicious of any revision text that prints them without saying which document they came from.

MNEMONIC

Dose, Duration, Delivery, Dysfunction

The four questions to answer before the word resistant is written. Was the dose pushed to the highest the patient tolerated; was it held for the minimum period the guideline sets for that particular drug; was the drug actually taken and, where it can be, was the exposure measured; and do moderate or severe symptoms still persist alongside psychosocial dysfunction. A trial that fails any of the first three does not belong in the tally, and a picture that fails the fourth is not resistance at all.

Resistance is earned by the trials, not declared by the symptoms: adequate dose, adequate duration, confirmed delivery, measured exposure where monitoring is indicated and available, and persisting symptoms with a functional cost, only then the word.

Drug monitoring, pharmacovigilance and pharmacogenomics

10 · Therapeutic drug monitoring in psychiatry: indications and target ranges (lithium, valproate, clozapine)

Most psychotropics are titrated against the patient. A short list is titrated against a number instead. The marks sit on which drugs belong on that list, when the sample is drawn, and what a printed band licenses; candidates lose them by treating every published range as one range, and by acting on a level that was never a valid measurement.

10.1 Which drugs earn a level, and why

An Indian postgraduate text gives the rationale for **therapeutic drug monitoring** in two limbs: a **narrow therapeutic index**, and confirmation of compliance. Kaplan and Sadock's Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry sharpens the first for lithium: it has a narrow therapeutic index, and there is large variability in the oral dose producing a given blood level, arising from differences in renal clearance. For lithium the variability limb is load-bearing, since a narrow margin alone would not compel routine measurement if the dose predicted the concentration.

RULE **A short margin and a dose that predicts the concentration badly are the rationale for measuring lithium routinely.** They are not a pair of conditions every monitored drug must satisfy: confirmation of compliance is a separate indication in the same Indian text, and others follow below. Where a drug has no accepted target range, the Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines state that a plasma level can only indicate adherence or potential toxicity, a two-branch rule that holds for agents no guideline names.

Two further indications sit outside that rationale. The Maudsley guidance on prescribing in physical illness recommends plasma-concentration-guided dosing when narrow-index drugs such as clozapine and lithium are given by enteral feeding tube, and adds, at a distinctly weaker strength, that monitoring may also help in some cases to distinguish non-response from lack of absorption. The underlying principles of half-life and therapeutic index belong to the Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes.

10.2 Steady state, and the arithmetic that fixes the first sample

A concentration drawn before the plateau measures where the patient has reached rather than where they will end up, so **steady state** is normally required before a result is read against a target range, and a deliberately early sample has to be labelled as early rather than compared uncritically with a steady-state band. The Maudsley guidelines note that although the common adage is four to five half-lives, three half-lives are sufficient for an approximation of steady state concentrations, and print the ladder that makes this derivable rather than remembered.

75%	87.5%	94%	97%
TWO HALF-LIVES	THREE HALF-LIVES	FOUR HALF-LIVES	FIVE HALF-LIVES

An Indian text gives lithium an average half-life of 18 to 24 hours, from which three half-lives is roughly two and a half to three days and five roughly four to five days. That arithmetic sits behind every published lithium sampling interval. One corollary is examined more often than taught: **loading doses** do not hasten the achievement of steady state.

10.3 The trough, and the conventions that do not agree

A level is a measurement with a time attached. The Maudsley technique for a **trough** sample is to draw immediately before the next dose, never withholding that dose more than one or possibly two hours to obtain it, and the same chapter requires that the time of sampling and of the last dose always be recorded. The first response to a surprising level is therefore to check the timing, not the dose.

> **PITFALL**
>
> Holding the morning dose so the patient can be sampled later in clinic. The result reads low and the reflex is to increase a dose that was never inadequate. The Maudsley limit exists precisely because a longer delay produces a falsely low result.

The conventions diverge, genuinely rather than by error. Kaplan and Sadock time the lithium level as a weekly trough during titration and then every three to six months once stable, whereas the United Kingdom and Indian sources specify hours after the last dose. In twice-daily dosing the two coincide, a sample twelve hours after the last dose falling immediately before the next, and the Indian guideline requires the draw to precede the next dose in twice-daily or thrice-daily regimens. With a single nightly dose that same twelve-hour sample sits mid-interval, a standardised post-dose level and not the predose trough, and that is what a stem supplying a dosing schedule is testing.

SOURCE	WHEN THE FIRST LITHIUM LEVEL IS DRAWN AFTER STARTING OR CHANGING THE DOSE
Indian Psychiatric Society bipolar guideline	At 5 days after dose initiation, sample drawn 11 to 13 hours after the last dose
NICE	At 1 week after starting, 1 week after every dose change, weekly until levels are stable
Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines	At 7 days, then 7 days after each dose change, blood taken 12 hours after the last dose
Kaplan and Sadock	Blood levels determined after 10 days of treatment at a specific dose

Note what the Maudsley entry does not contain. It gives a starting dose and then hands the escalation to the plasma level, repeating that level after every dose change until the desired concentration is reached. No milligram maximum for lithium appears anywhere in the entry,

because the ceiling it works to is a concentration and not a dose. That is the pattern to carry into a lithium question, rather than a top milligram figure the table never issues.

The Indian guideline states its own instruction twice in two different forms: its monitoring footnote gives a window running 11 to 13 hours after the last dose, its narrative a single point at 12 hours. The two are compatible, the point sitting inside the window, but neither is the guideline figure to the exclusion of the other.

10.4 Lithium: bands by phase, by age and by source

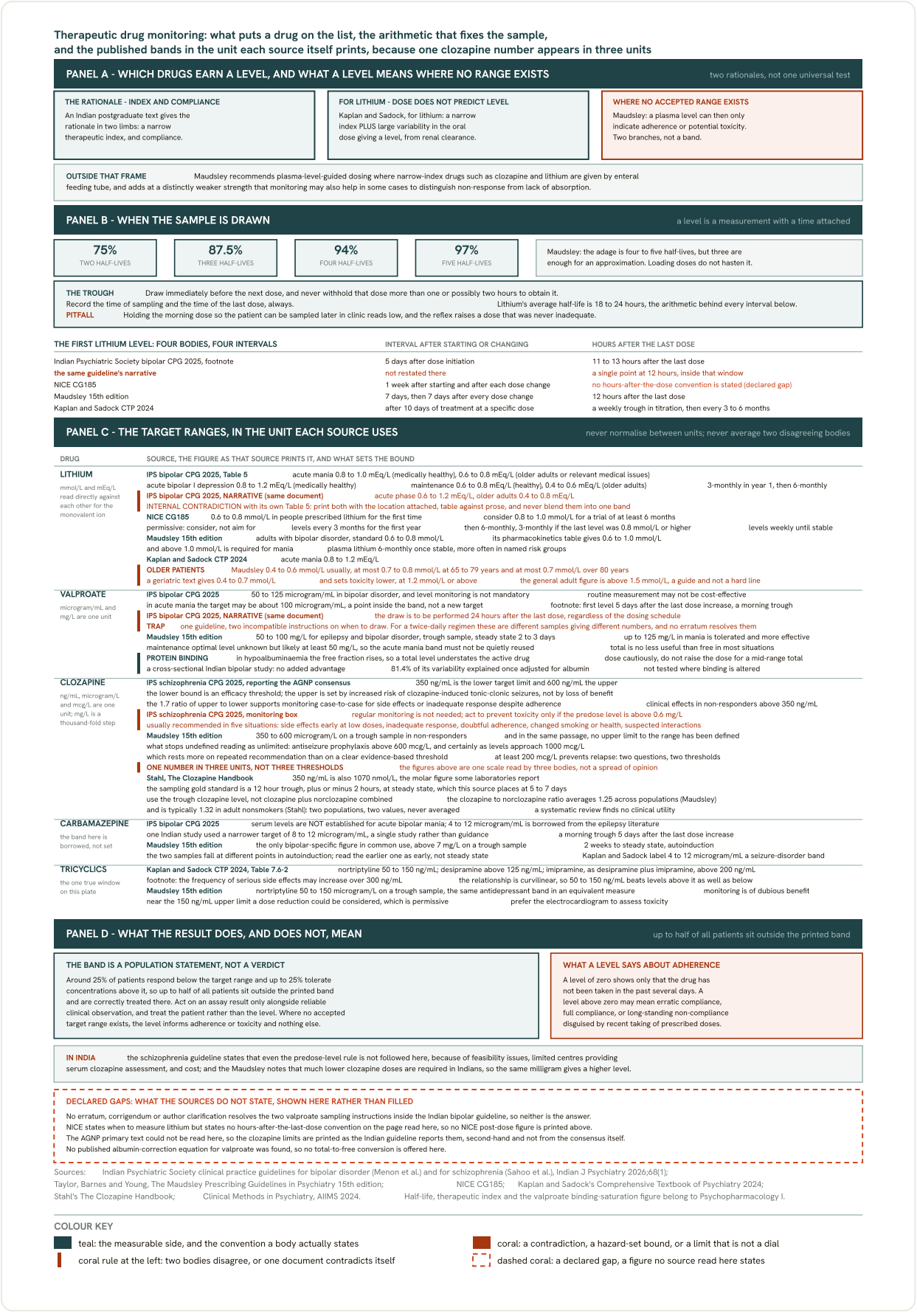


Fig 37.5 Therapeutic drug monitoring: which drugs earn a level, when the sample is drawn, and the bands as each source prints them. The lithium bands differ across four bodies, the Indian bipolar guideline contradicts

itself twice, and the clozapine target is one number printed in three units. (IPS CPG 2025; Maudsley 15th edition; NICE CG185; Kaplan and Sadock, CTP 2024; Stahl, The Clozapine Handbook.)

There is no single lithium target range, and an answer offering one is wrong against three of the four standard sources. The Indian Psychiatric Society bipolar guideline sets acute mania at 0.8 to 1.0 mEq/L in the medically healthy and 0.6 to 0.8 mEq/L in older adults or those with relevant medical issues; acute depression in bipolar type I disorder at 0.8 to 1.2 meq/L in the medically healthy; and maintenance at 0.6 to 0.8 mEq/L in the medically healthy and 0.4 to 0.6 mEq/L in older adults or those with medical comorbidity. That same document then contradicts itself: its narrative on optimising treatment gives a wider acute-phase band of 0.6 to 1.2 mEq/L and an older-adult band of 0.4 to 0.8 mEq/L, which differ from its own table figures. Quoting either alone leaves a candidate wrong against the other.

The other bodies sit near these numbers without landing on them. NICE, under its recommendation on starting lithium, directs aiming for **0.6 to 0.8 mmol/L** in people prescribed lithium for the first time, a lithium-naive rather than phase-specific target, and separately allows clinicians to consider 0.8 to 1.0 mmol/L for a trial period of at least six months after relapse on lithium; note the permissive modal. The Maudsley guidelines give adults with bipolar disorder a standard of 0.6 to 0.8 mmol/L, while their pharmacokinetics table gives 0.6 to 1.0 mmol/L and states that above 1.0 mmol/L is required for mania. Kaplan and Sadock give 0.8 to 1.2 mEq/L for acute mania. For the monovalent lithium ion the millimolar and milliequivalent figures are numerically identical, so these read directly against each other.

In older patients the sources share a floor and diverge on the ceiling. The Maudsley guidelines alone band the target by decade, giving 0.4 to 0.6 mmol/L usually and at most 0.7 to 0.8 mmol/L between sixty-five and seventy-nine years; a geriatric text gives 0.4 to 0.7 mmol/L and defines toxicity lower than the general adult texts, at 1.2 mmol/L or above. The general adult toxicity figure, above 1.5 mmol/L, marks where these ranges stop and is a guide rather than a hard line; toxicity itself belongs to the Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes.

Monitoring frequency, once levels are stable, divides on whether the first year is treated differently.

- NICE requires levels every three months for the first year.
- The Indian guideline sets the same three-monthly first year and six-monthly thereafter in healthy individuals, once stable values are seen.
- NICE then drops to six-monthly but keeps three-monthly monitoring for six named higher-risk groups, including anyone whose last level was 0.8 mmol/L or higher.
- The Maudsley guidelines go straight to six-monthly, with more frequent monitoring for interacting drugs, the elderly and renal impairment.

10.5 Valproate: one band, one mania figure, and a contradiction about when to draw

The Indian Psychiatric Society bipolar guideline gives a target of **50 to 125 microgram/mL** in bipolar disorder and states in the same breath that level monitoring is not mandatory, adding that routine measurement may not be necessary or cost-effective in all patients, with poor

therapeutic response or doubts about compliance as examples of when it is indicated. Read the qualifier precisely: not warranted in all patients is not the same as generally unnecessary.

Within that band the guideline notes a linear dose-response relationship in acute mania and states the target may be about 100 microgram/mL, not a separate target. The Maudsley pharmacokinetics table gives a narrower headline range of 50 to 100 mg/L for epilepsy and bipolar disorder on a trough sample, with time to steady state of 2 to 3 days, yet its own comments column concedes that in mania levels up to 125 mg/L are tolerated and more effective than lower concentrations. For maintenance the Maudsley position is an honest blank: optimal levels are unknown but likely at least 50 mg/L, so the acute mania band must not be quietly reused.

TRAP **One guideline, two incompatible instructions on when to draw the valproate sample.** The monitoring footnote permits the first serum level 5 days after the last dose increase, collected in the morning before the first dose of the day. The narrative directs that the draw be performed 24 hours after the last dose, regardless of dosing schedule. For a twice-daily regimen these are different samples giving different numbers, and no erratum resolves them, so a candidate who picks one substitutes their own judgement for the guideline's.

Two further points are frequently mishandled. Valproate is highly protein-bound, so in **hypoalbuminaemia** the **free fraction** rises and a given total level produces a greater effect than expected; the instruction is to dose cautiously, not to raise the dose in response to a mid-range total. Total valproate nonetheless remains the standard analyte, and the sources qualify that rather than universalise it: the Maudsley guidelines state that total concentration is no less useful than free levels in most situations, and an Indian study found free valproate offers no added advantage, with 81.4% of its variability explained once total valproate was adjusted for albumin. The separate binding-saturation figure of 45 to 50 microgram/mL belongs to the Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes and is not the bottom of a target band, though the Indian bipolar floor does sit at that saturation point.

10.6 Clozapine: one number in three units

The Indian Psychiatric Society schizophrenia guideline sets the clozapine target at **350 to 600 ng/mL**, reporting these figures second-hand from an international consensus rather than deriving them, and states that non-responders achieve clinical effects when serum levels are above 350 ng/mL. The two ends are set by different things, and that asymmetry is the teachable point: the lower bound is an efficacy threshold, the upper bound, 600 ng/mL, is set by increased risk of clozapine-induced tonic-clonic seizures rather than loss of benefit. With a ratio of 1.7 between its upper and lower target concentrations, clozapine has a narrow therapeutic index window, which the Indian guideline offers as support for monitoring on a case-to-case basis where side effects or inadequate response are suspected despite good adherence, not as a reason to measure every patient.

TRAP **Reading three units as three thresholds.** The Indian guideline's monitoring box triggers action, to prevent toxicity, on a predose level above 0.6 mg/L; the Maudsley pharmacokinetics table gives clozapine 350 to 600 microgram/L on a trough sample; the consensus figures reported by the Indian guideline are 350 ng/mL lower and 600 ng/mL upper. These are one number in three units, not a spread of opinion. Stahl's Clozapine Handbook adds the molar equivalent some laboratories report, giving the response threshold as 350 ng/mL or 1070 nmol/L.

The ceiling is less settled than the schizophrenia band suggests: the Maudsley text states that in non-responders the dose should be adjusted to give plasma levels in the range 350 to 600 microgram/L and, in the same passage, that an upper limit to the target range has not been defined; print it beside the consensus figure, not instead of it. What stops undefined being read as unlimited is the same page's anchor: antiseizure prophylaxis against seizures and myoclonus is prudent when clozapine plasma levels are above 600 mcg/L, and certainly as levels approach 1000 mcg/L, with the caveat that this rests more on repeated recommendation than on a clear evidence-based threshold. Separately, limited data suggest at least 200 mcg/L is required to prevent relapse, so response in schizophrenia and relapse prevention are two questions with two thresholds.

The Indian schizophrenia guideline enumerates five conditions under which clozapine monitoring is usually recommended: early in treatment with prominent side effects at lower doses, inadequate response, doubtful adherence, a change in smoking habits or health, and suspected interactions or side effects. The qualifier is usually recommended, and the box is imported from a United Kingdom practical-considerations paper rather than being guideline-original.

IN INDIA

The same guideline states that regular clozapine monitoring is not needed and is to be conducted only if predose levels are above 0.6 mg/L, especially in smokers, to prevent toxicity, and that in the Indian context even that is not done, because of feasibility issues, limited centres providing serum clozapine assessment, and cost. The Maudsley guidelines note that much lower clozapine doses are required in East Asians, Indians and Bangladeshis, so the same milligram produces a higher concentration here than in the populations the target range came from. Where the assay is unavailable, that argues for a lower starting point and slower titration.

Stahl sets the sampling gold standard as a 12 hour trough, plus or minus 2 hours at steady state, which that source places at 5 to 7 days as a practical assay margin, against the shorter interval the Maudsley table allows for comparable agents. Response correlates best with the trough clozapine level rather than the combined clozapine plus **norclozapine** concentration, which settles which figure the target applies to. The clozapine to norclozapine ratio, not the range-width ratio above, carries two sourced values for two populations and must not be averaged: the Maudsley guidelines give an average of 1.25 across populations with marked individual variation, Stahl a typical 1.32 in adult nonsmokers. A fall in the ratio suggests enzyme induction, a rise inhibition

or a non-trough sample. The counterweight: a systematic review concludes the ratio has no clinical utility.

10.7 Carbamazepine and the tricyclics: a borrowed band and a true window

The Indian guideline is explicit that therapeutic carbamazepine serum levels have not been established for acute bipolar mania, and that clinicians borrow 4 to 12 microgram/mL from the epilepsy literature; printing that as a psychiatric target misstates the guideline. Kaplan and Sadock corroborate the borrowing by labelling the same 4 to 12 microgram/mL band as belonging to seizure disorders. The guideline separately notes one Indian study using a narrower target of 8 to 12 microgram/mL, a single study rather than guidance, while the Maudsley table gives the only bipolar-specific figure in common use, a floor of above 7 mg/L on a trough sample. Timing is where this drug differs: the Maudsley table allows 2 weeks to steady state because of **autoinduction**, whereas the Indian guideline times the sample as a morning trough drawn 5 days after the last dose increase. The two samples fall at different points in that autoinduction, so an early post-increase level need not match a later one and must be read as early rather than as a steady-state result; both are printed.

The tricyclics supply the one true therapeutic window here. The nortriptyline concentration-response relationship is curvilinear, so **50 to 150 ng/mL** is more effective than concentrations above it as well as below it, unlike lithium or clozapine, where the upper bound is set by toxicity. Kaplan and Sadock print nortriptyline at 50 to 150 ng/mL, desipramine above 125 ng/mL and imipramine, measured as desipramine plus imipramine, above 200 ng/mL, with a footnote that the frequency of serious side effects may increase over 300 ng/mL; the Maudsley table gives nortriptyline 50 to 150 microgram/L, the same antidepressant band in an equivalent unit. Only nortriptyline has a ceiling of efficacy, and that is the discriminator. Where the level sits near the upper limit of 150 ng/mL, a dose reduction could be considered, which is permissive rather than mandatory. No Indian guideline addresses tricyclic monitoring, so this window is United Kingdom and United States guidance, not Indian practice.

> **GOOD TO REMEMBER**
>
> The Maudsley guidelines judge tricyclic level monitoring rarely used and of dubious benefit, preferring the electrocardiogram to assess toxicity. Where a tricyclic assay is unobtainable, the tracing is the instrument of choice.

10.8 Reading the result

The interpretive rules carry more marks than the ranges. The Maudsley position is to act on assay results only alongside reliable clinical observation, and to treat the patient rather than the level. The same chapter quantifies it: around 25% of patients respond below the target range and up to 25% tolerate concentrations above it, so up to half of all patients sit outside the printed band and are correctly treated there.

Adherence needs the same discipline. A plasma level of zero indicates only that the drug has not been taken in the past several days. A level above zero may indicate erratic compliance, full

compliance, or long-standing non-compliance disguised by recent taking of prescribed doses, and it is that third possibility a candidate loses by writing that a level confirms adherence. Doubtful adherence is a named indication in both the clozapine box and the valproate footnote, so the limitation must sit beside them.

MNEMONIC

Time, Taken, Target, Tolerance

Four questions before acting on any result: was the sample timed correctly against the last dose, has the drug been taken, does an accepted target range exist for this agent, and is this patient responding and tolerating where they sit. A level failing the first two settles nothing.

A concentration is evidence about exposure, never a verdict on treatment: check the timing, then the patient, then the band.

11 · Pharmacovigilance, adverse drug reaction reporting and signal detection

A licence is granted on a few thousand patients and then tested on a few million. Everything a psychotropic will do that is rare, delayed, or confined to a subgroup is discovered after marketing, by clinicians who notice something and write it down. The marks here are rarely on defining the word. They sit on the discriminations inside it: reaction against event, severity against seriousness, causality grade against causality instrument, and signal against demonstrated harm. Each pair is a place where two words that sound interchangeable carry different technical meanings and send the clinician down a different path.

11.1 The definitions that are examined against each other

An Indian postgraduate pharmacology text gives the wording an examiner expects. **Pharmacovigilance** is defined by the World Health Organization, in its 2002 formulation, as the science and the activities that relate to detecting, assessing, understanding and preventing adverse effects or any other drug related problems. Take those four verbs in order, because they are the architecture of the discipline: nothing can be assessed that was never detected, and nothing can be prevented that was never understood.

Two narrower terms sit inside that definition and are routinely conflated. An **adverse drug reaction**, in that same Indian text's wording, is the technically narrow one: a noxious change suspected to be due to a drug, occurring at doses normally used in man, which requires treatment or a decrease in dose or indicates caution in the future use of the same drug. Three exclusions fall out of that wording, and they are exclusions of this text's definition rather than of the term as every body uses it. On this wording it is not every side effect, because the change must be noxious and must compel a response; it is not poisoning or overdose, because the dose must be one normally used; and it is not a change merely coincident with treatment, because a drug must at least be suspected. The clause requiring that the change compel a response is the textbook's, and it should be attributed rather than carried into a definition credited to anyone else. An **adverse drug event** discards that last requirement, covering any untoward medical occurrence that may

present during treatment with a medicine but does not necessarily have a causal relationship with the treatment.

RULE **Record the event; let the system decide whether it was a reaction.** The event definition is deliberately causality-agnostic and the reaction definition is not. A clinician who waits until they are convinced the drug was responsible has applied the wrong definition at the wrong point in the pipeline, because causality is judged later, by a different body, on the submitted individual case information. Pooled information belongs to signal detection, which is a separate process further downstream.

11.2 Type, severity and seriousness: three classifications, not one

The classification that matters clinically splits reactions by whether they follow from the drug's known pharmacology. **Type B** reactions, the unpredictable or bizarre limb, are based on peculiarities of the patient rather than on the drug's known actions and include allergy and idiosyncrasy; the same text calls them less common, often non-dose related, generally more serious, and requiring withdrawal of the drug. That last property is the operative one at the bedside, because it takes dose reduction off the menu. The receptor logic behind each class's expected adverse-effect signature belongs to the Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes; what belongs here is that a reaction outside that signature is a different kind of object.

One sentence in that passage does more work than the rest of the taxonomy: some Type B reactions can be predicted and prevented if their genetic basis is known and a suitable test to characterise the individual's phenotype is performed. That is the argument for pre-prescription testing wherever the genetic basis is known and a validated test exists, and the source confines it to some of these reactions rather than extending it to the Type B limb as a whole. Note too that the sentence asks for a test characterising the phenotype, which genotyping informs without being interchangeable with it. Stated inside a pharmacovigilance chapter rather than a genetics one, it is the hinge to the pharmacogenomics material and to allele-directed testing before the anticonvulsants.

Severity is graded on operational thresholds rather than on impression.

SEVERITY GRADE	WHAT DEFINES IT
Minor	No therapy, antidote or prolongation of hospitalisation is required
Moderate	Requires a change in drug therapy or specific treatment, or prolongs hospital stay by at least one day
Severe	Potentially life-threatening, causes permanent damage, or requires intensive medical treatment
Lethal	Directly or indirectly contributes to the death of the patient

Seriousness is a separate axis with its own outcome list, and it is the one that drives regulatory timelines. A reaction is **serious** if it results in death, a life-threatening condition, hospitalisation

or prolonged hospitalisation, disability, congenital anomaly, an intervention required to prevent permanent impairment or damage, or any other medically important condition. Note what that list does not contain: the reporter's sense of how unwell the patient looked.

TRAP **Writing severity and seriousness as synonyms.** They are independent classifications that happen to share vocabulary. A dystonic reaction settling with one injection took a specific treatment, so it grades moderate on the table above rather than minor, however brief it was; the minor grade needs a change that called for no therapy, no antidote and no added hospital day at all. An admission for observation after a first seizure is serious by the outcome list whatever the reporter thinks of it. Candidates lose the mark by grading one scale and answering on the other.

11.3 Causality: four criteria, and two competing instruments

Causality assessment rests on four named criteria, and every algorithm in use is a way of weighting them. Temporal relationship asks how the time sequence of the event relates to drug administration. Previous knowledge asks whether the drug is known to produce the event in earlier recipients with a certain degree of consistency. **Dechallenge** asks whether the event subsided on stopping the drug, and **rechallenge** asks whether it reappeared when the drug was given again after a gap, a step that is frequently not performed because deliberate rechallenge is unethical or dangerous. The fourth criterion is therefore the strongest evidence available and the least often obtainable.

MNEMONIC

Temporal, Previous knowledge, Dechallenge, Rechallenge

The four questions in the order a case is actually reconstructed: when did it start relative to the drug, is this drug known to do this, did it stop when the drug stopped, and did it return when the drug returned. An answer opening with a scoring instrument has started in the wrong place.

Applied to those criteria, the Indian textbook grades causality into four levels: definite, where causality is proven; probable, where it is not proven but the drug is the likely cause; possible, where the drug as well as other causes could be responsible; and doubtful, where the drug is unlikely to be the cause but cannot be ruled out. The scale used inside the Indian programme is a different one. The World Health Organization and Uppsala Monitoring Centre system carries six categories rather than four: certain, probable or likely, possible, unlikely, conditional or unclassified, and unassessable or unclassifiable. The last two are not degrees of confidence but dispositions for cases that cannot yet be judged, which is why the count differs.

TRAP **Naming one causality instrument as the Indian standard.** Two bodies say two different things and both are examinable. The Indian pharmacology text states that pharmacovigilance centres are expected to assess causality and severity using standard algorithms and rating scales, and offers the Naranjo algorithm for causality assessment and the modified Hartwig scale for severity grading as its examples, not as mandated instruments. The Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission's own programme paperwork states flatly that causality assessment is carried out at the monitoring centres using the World Health Organization and Uppsala Monitoring Centre scale. Print both, attributed. Averaging them, or quietly picking the one you revised, turns a correct fact into a wrong answer.

Two discriminations inside the six-category scale are worth carrying. Certain requires one assessment criterion that probable does not, the fourth: that the event be definitive pharmacologically or phenomenologically. Any other event is automatically excluded and can never qualify for certain, however convincing the time course. Probable and possible separate on a different axis: in possible there may be another equally likely explanation for the event, or there is no information or uncertainty about what happened after stopping.

GOOD TO REMEMBER

In practice few adverse reactions are certain or unlikely; most are somewhere between those extremes, possible or probable. That reflects the instrument rather than the assessor. The source is explicit about the limits: no causality system has been shown to produce a precise and reliable quantitative estimation of the likelihood of the relationship, and the system cannot prove the connection between drug and event, nor change uncertainty into certainty. A causality grade is a structured opinion, worth exactly what its criteria are worth.

11.4 The Naranjo probability scale

The Naranjo adverse drug reaction probability scale is the algorithm most often asked for by name. It is a 10-item questionnaire, and the LiverTox reference that reproduces it gives the arithmetic: total scores range from **-4 to +13**, the reaction being definite at 9 or higher, probable at 5 to 8, possible at 1 to 4, and doubtful at 0 or less. The Indian textbook names the algorithm without printing those bands, so a candidate quoting them should know where they come from.

The internal weighting tells you what the instrument believes. Two items score +2 for a yes rather than the usual one, and they are the temporal item, asking whether the event appeared after the suspected drug was administered, and the rechallenge item, asking whether it reappeared when the drug was readministered; each scores -1 for a negative answer and 0 where the answer is unknown. The weighting is therefore asymmetric rather than doubled in both directions: time and rechallenge gain two points for a yes but cost only the ordinary single point for a no. The instrument rewards a positive time course and a positive rechallenge more than it penalises their absence, which is what makes a negative rechallenge so much weaker evidence than a positive one. Note also that the scale runs to ten items, so it is not the four causality criteria rewritten as arithmetic.

The documentation is candid about the trade. Against the more elaborate organ-specific instrument it is easier to apply but has less sensitivity and specificity in assigning causality in

drug-induced liver injury, and it subtracts points for reappearance of the event on placebo, an item that does not exist outside a trial. A tool carrying an item that cannot be answered outside a trial is being used at the bedside, and that deserves a sentence in any answer that names it.

11.5 The Indian system, and where a report actually goes

The national programme has a datable history that is examined directly. A nationwide pharmacovigilance programme was initiated in **July 2010**, with the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi as the first National Coordinating Centre. That role shifted to the Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission at Ghaziabad in April 2011, where it remains, and the commission's coordinating centre was launched as a World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Pharmacovigilance in Public Health Programmes and Regulatory Services on 30 October 2017. The older textbook description, in which the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization coordinates the programme through peripheral, regional and zonal monitoring centres alongside a national advisory committee, describes the earlier architecture; the current structure is one national centre with a flat network of monitoring centres. Both wordings circulate in question banks.

22	895	4th	3.6%
MONITORING CENTRES AT LAUNCH	CENTRES AT LATEST REPORT	RANK BY REPORT VOLUME	SHARE OF WORLD REPORTS

Date-stamp those figures rather than memorising them loose. The network reached its present size by the end of financial year 2023-24, with 209 centres enrolling in that year alone, and the rank and share above belong to that same index period, measured against 179 member countries of the World Health Organization Programme for International Drug Monitoring. That annual rank is not the country's cumulative standing, which is a separate and lower figure, and an answer quoting one for the other is wrong in either direction.

The pathway is drawable and worth drawing. The monitoring centre reports each individual case safety report to the national coordinating centre through VigiFlow; those reports are assessed at the national centre for quality of data and, if found valid, committed onward to the global drug monitoring centre, the Uppsala Monitoring Centre in Sweden, which is the international collaborating centre. Incomplete or invalid reports go back to the originating centre. VigiBase, the global database at the far end of that pipe, held over 40 million reports from 180+ member countries as of February 2025. A single ward report is one line in that.

11.6 Who reports, on what form, and by when

Reporting duty in India is not one duty, and collapsing it into one is the commonest error in this topic.

REPORTER	INSTRUMENT	WHAT THE SOURCE STATES ABOUT THE DUTY
Patient or consumer	Medicines Side-Effect Reporting Form, available in 10 Indian languages including Kannada, Hindi, Marathi, Tamil and Telugu	The form itself states that reporting is voluntary, has no legal implication, and aims to improve patient welfare
Healthcare professional	Suspected ADR Reporting Form for Healthcare Professionals, Version 1.4, on the commission and regulator websites and in the National Formulary of India 2021	Mandatory fields are patient initials, age at onset of reaction, reaction terms, date of onset, suspected medications and reporter information; incomplete reports are still wanted
Marketing authorisation holder	Expedited individual reports, plus the periodic safety update report under Schedule Y	For a new drug, reports are to be furnished by the applicant every six months for the first two years after approval and annually for the subsequent two years, and the licensing authority may extend the total duration if it is considered necessary in the interest of public health

The asymmetry is the teaching point. All serious adverse events and reactions must be reported by the marketing authorisation holder to the regulatory authority and the national coordinating centre within **15 days** of initial receipt of the information, a hard expedited clock with a named duty-holder. Nothing comparable is stated of the consumer, whose form declares reporting voluntary in terms. Writing that adverse drug reaction reporting is mandatory in India therefore fails on at least one of the three duty-holders, whichever one the examiner had in mind. Beyond the paper form, the programme runs a toll-free helpline on 1800 180 3024, from 9:00 AM to 5:30 PM, Monday to Friday, a reporting mobile application, and an email route to the coordinating centre.

IN INDIA

What to do on the ward when a psychotropic is suspected. Use the Suspected ADR Reporting Form for Healthcare Professionals rather than a free-text note, because its mandatory fields are the minimum the national centre can act on: patient initials, age at onset, the reaction term, the date of onset, the suspected medication and your own details. Send it even when the rest is missing. Do not delay the report while you work towards certainty. The formal grade is assigned at the monitoring centre on the World Health Organization and Uppsala Monitoring Centre scale; your own working judgment about whether the drug did this is for the patient in front of you, not a precondition for sending the form. Where the patient prefers to report independently, the consumer form exists in Kannada as well as nine other Indian languages, which makes direct patient reporting an option to offer rather than a theoretical one.

PITFALL

Holding the report back until you are certain. Two features of the system are built against that instinct: the event definition asks only for an untoward occurrence during treatment and does not require a causal relationship, and the form is built around a small mandatory core with incomplete reports still wanted. The clinician owns the observation and its timing. Formal grading is completed downstream from the individual report; pooled cases are used separately, for signal detection.

11.7 Signal detection: from a database to a hypothesis

A **signal** is defined by the World Health Organization, in the wording the Indian programme itself quotes, as reported information on a possible causal relationship between an adverse event and a drug, the relationship being unknown or incompletely documented previously. The novelty clause is load-bearing, and it turns on novelty rather than on volume: repeated reports of an already-labelled reaction are not new by count alone, though they may still signal a new aspect of the known association. The broader international standard, the CIOMS VIII (2010) definition, widens this in two ways, accepting information suggesting a new potentially causal association or a new aspect of a known association, adverse or beneficial, judged sufficiently likely to justify verificatory action. A new aspect of an old association counts, and so does a beneficial one. What neither definition supplies is causation: a signal does not indicate a direct causal relationship between an adverse event and a medicine, and is essentially a hypothesis.

The statistics are a screening step, not a verdict. The Indian programme performs **disproportionality analysis** on drug-event combinations, based on the contrast between the observed and the expected number of cases, using four key parameters.

- The **Information Component**, which the programme states originated from the Bayesian Confidence Propagation Neural Network and describes as a logarithmic measure of disproportionality, the observed and expected counts being those of one drug and reaction combination against the rest of the report database. The equation itself is deliberately not reproduced. The passage quoted from the programme's report carries the criterion and the credibility interval and does not carry the formula, and the formula as it stands in the report's own text is not a well-formed expression, its numerator and denominator brackets having been lost somewhere between the printed page and the machine-readable text. Reconstructing the brackets would be an inference, and a reader cannot tell a reconstructed equation from a quoted one. Write the Information Component in words unless the primary methodological paper is in front of you. The criterion for a signal is set at **IC025 greater than 0**, IC025 being the lower end point of the 95% credibility interval for each drug and reaction combination, and that criterion is what the source states in its own words. A positive Information Component means the combination is reported more often than the rest of the database predicts, zero means no quantitative dependency, and a negative value means it is reported less often than expected.
- The Proportional Reporting Ratio, with a criterion for a signal of PRR of at least 2.

- Chi-square, with a criterion for a signal of at least 4.
- The number of drug-event combinations, of which at least 3 are required, in the programme's own wording, for the confirmation of a signal. Read the parameter as the count of reports carrying the single drug and reaction pair under test: three is the minimum case count that the disproportionality convention pairs with the ratio and chi-square thresholds, and it is not a demand for three different combinations. Meeting it screens a pair in as a potential signal rather than confirming causality.

No single parameter is decisive: fulfilment of at least three of these four parameters is required before a drug and reaction combination is considered a potential signal. Note also what is being compared. Observed and expected counts are both computed from within the report database, so the comparison sets one drug-event pair against the rest of the reporting, never against the treated population, and no incidence can be read off it.

Human review sits after the arithmetic. The programme's Signal Review Panel comprises scientists and clinical experts affiliated to government and non-government academic institutions and hospitals, and assesses the results of identified computerised signals from individual case safety reports in order to validate and confirm them. The volume surviving to regulatory action is small: in the most recently reported year the programme issued 13 drug safety alerts and recommended 7 prescribing information leaflet changes, including 3 signals, to the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization for appropriate regulatory action.

11.8 Where this touches the psychiatric prescription

The trial phase that finds what matters to psychiatry is the last one. Post-marketing surveillance, Phase IV, provides methods capable of detecting uncommon and idiosyncratic reactions, those appearing only after long-term use, and unsuspected drug interactions. Capable of, not guaranteed to, and not alone in it: the spontaneous reporting stream and the database signal work set out earlier in this section run alongside a formal Phase IV study, as do registries and observational database studies. Its own method is unglamorous: practising physicians are identified and data are collected from them on a structured proforma about the efficacy, acceptability and adverse effects of the drug in the real field situation. Because the study population is patients treated in the normal course, post-authorisation sources can cumulatively cover populations much larger and more representative than the pre-authorisation trials, and that is why they surface what the trials could not, though an individual post-marketing study may be small and an individual licensing programme large. For agents used for years in populations no trial enrolled, this is an important source of the evidence there will be rather than the whole of it.

The prevention list in the same textbook closes the loop with the rest of this chapter. Among its concrete practices is to carry out appropriate laboratory monitoring, with prothrombin time on warfarin and serum drug levels on lithium as its worked examples. A measured concentration is therefore not only a dosing tool but a pharmacovigilance instrument: an adverse reaction prevented rather than reported. Which psychotropics earn a level, when the sample is drawn and

what the printed band licenses are taught where therapeutic drug monitoring is set out, and none of those numbers belong here.

> Report the event, not your verdict on it: causality is graded downstream, and the report that never left the ward is the one the database cannot see.

12 · Pharmacogenomics in psychiatry (CYP2D6, CYP2C19, HLA-B alleles) and clinical application

A genotype changes a prescription only where someone has published what to do with it. The marks in this topic sit on the decision rather than on the molecular biology: which variant is worth knowing before which drug, in which population, and what a result licenses you to change. Two cytochrome enzymes and two HLA loci carry almost all of the examinable material, and candidates lose it in three predictable places. They read a population frequency as an individual phenotype, they carry a recommendation from one drug across to its neighbour on the same enzyme, and they treat a genotype report as a permanent property of the patient when the patient's own prescription has already moved it.

12.1 The two enzymes worth knowing, and what each one clears

KDT ranks **CYP2D6** as the next most important cytochrome isoform after CYP3A4/5, metabolising nearly 20% of drugs, a denominator that is all drugs and not psychotropics, against the nearly 50% biotransformed by the leader. Read that denominator before you quote the figure, because it is the commonest distortion in this topic, and the substrate list the same source gives ranges across tricyclic antidepressants, SSRIs, many neuroleptics, antiarrhythmics, codeine, debrisoquine and metoprolol. An enzyme handling a fifth of the pharmacopoeia is not thereby handling a fifth of your prescriptions.

The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines print a brief summary of important interactions, and in it the psychiatric substrate cells for the two polymorphic enzymes sit side by side. Read each cell as a selection of important substrates rather than as a complete inventory of what the enzyme clears.

- CYP2D6 metabolises aripiprazole, atomoxetine, brexpiprazole, clozapine, codeine, dextromethorphan, donepezil, duloxetine, haloperidol, phenothiazines, risperidone, tamoxifen, tricyclics, tramadol, trazodone, venlafaxine and vortioxetine.
- CYP2C19 metabolises citalopram, diazepam and moclobemide.

The Maudsley summary table lists three selected CYP2C19 substrates against a much longer CYP2D6 cell, and the short cell is a selection and not the whole of what CYP2C19 clears: the CPIC rows set out below act on escitalopram, which that cell does not name. The short cell is still where the pharmacogenomic decision bites hardest, because citalopram sits on it and citalopram is a psychotropic whose phenotype carries a regulatory dose ceiling. The cytochrome substrate map as a principle, and the interaction matrix built on top of it, belong to the

Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes. What follows here is only what a reported phenotype changes.

12.2 From genotype to phenotype: the activity score

A laboratory reports alleles; a prescriber needs a phenotype. For CYP2D6 the bridge is an **activity score**, and CPIC translates that score into a phenotype through a per-score lookup table: 0.0 is a **poor metaboliser**, 0.25 an **intermediate metaboliser**, 1.25 a normal metaboliser and 2.5 an ultrarapid metaboliser. The published table lists a phenotype against each score and does not print the edges between the bands, so the upper edge of the intermediate and of the normal band is not stated here. Two things follow that are worth fixing in memory. Any published poor-metaboliser frequency for this enzyme means the proportion of people sitting at a score of zero and nothing else, so the frequency and the cut-point are one fact rather than two. And the lowest non-zero score is already an intermediate metaboliser under the current standard, not a poor one, which is exactly the boundary a multiple-choice stem will place its distractor on.

The scheme is not shared across genes. For CYP2C19 the phenotype names CPIC uses are poor, intermediate, normal, rapid and ultrarapid metaboliser, so a report that classifies patients into a different set of categories is not reporting the same quantity, however similar the words look.

12.3 How common each phenotype is, and why the group label is half the number

The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines record that about 20% of Asian people and 3 to 5 percent of people of European descent are CYP2C19 poor metabolisers. CPIC publishes the same quantity by **biogeographic group**, and its figures diverge from those, because the word Asian is undefined in the first source and is split into separate groups in the second.

13.0%	8.2%	4.1%	2.4%
EAST ASIAN	CENTRAL/SOUTH ASIAN	AFRICAN AMERICAN/AFRO-CARIBBEAN	EUROPEAN

Those are CPIC's CYP2C19 poor-metaboliser frequencies, and the South Asian value is roughly three times the European one, which is the single most defensible pharmacogenomic statement available about Indian patients. Within that same Central/South Asian group the rest of the distribution matters as much as its tail: intermediate metabolisers 40.8%, normal metabolisers only 29.6%, and ultrarapid metabolisers 2.9%. A fully normal CYP2C19 phenotype is the minority state in this group, which is not the intuition a table derived from European samples trains.

TRAP **Treating Asian as one population, then averaging two sources that counted different people.** One source quotes a single Asian figure without defining the group; the other splits the same phenotype into East Asian and Central/South Asian and returns two different and lower numbers. No arithmetic reconciles them, because they are not estimates of the same quantity. Print each figure with its population attached, and remember that if the stem says South Asian, the East Asian number is a wrong answer even though it is a correct number.

CYP2D6 runs in the opposite direction, and this is the part most candidates get backwards. CPIC's activity-score-zero frequency is 2.4% in the Central/South Asian group and 6.5% in Europeans, with East Asians lowest at 0.8% and the African American and Afro-Caribbean group at 2.3%. Notice that the Central/South Asian figure for this enzyme is numerically the same as the European figure for the other one in the strip above. Identical digits, different enzyme, different group, opposite clinical meaning: that coincidence is the reason every number in this topic has to travel with both its gene and its population.

TRAP **Assuming slow metabolism travels together.** Poor metabolisers of CYP2C19 are commoner in South Asians than in Europeans; poor metabolisers of CYP2D6 are less common. A stem offering "Indian patients are poor metabolisers" as a single fact is testing whether the candidate knows the statement is enzyme-specific and that its direction reverses between the two enzymes that matter most in psychiatry.

One genuine disagreement should be carried rather than resolved. CPIC's European CYP2D6 poor-metaboliser estimate sits above the figure the Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines give for people of European descent for the same enzyme. Both are published, neither is an error, and the honest answer attributes the number to the body that issued it instead of blending them. What survives both sources is the direction: for CYP2D6 the European rate exceeds the South Asian one.

GOOD TO REMEMBER

These group frequencies are model output, not counts of people. CPIC states that diplotype and phenotype frequencies are estimated from reported allele frequencies using the **Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium** equation, with the margin of error compounding across the alleles that make up a diplotype. Use them as a prior for how likely an unusual phenotype is in the patient in front of you. Do not use them as a substitute for the individual test when the decision genuinely turns on that patient's phenotype.

12.4 What Indian cohorts add, and what a single cohort cannot carry

CPIC's Central/South Asian label is a biogeographic grouping and not a synonym for Indian, so the nearest primary data are individual Indian cohorts. One Indian cohort of healthy volunteers reports a predicted CYP2C19 poor-metaboliser frequency, the phenotype inferred from genotype and not measured, and neither that frequency nor the number of volunteers behind it is printed here: the report itself could not be consulted here, and a prevalence figure is precisely the sort of number a reader carries forward unchecked. The allele frequencies reported for that same cohort are CYP2C19*2 at 0.365, CYP2C19*3 at 0.0033 and CYP2C19*17 at 0.18: one loss-of-function allele that is genuinely common, a second that is vanishingly rare, and a third present at appreciable frequency.

Two disciplines travel with those figures. The first is how to name them. This is one cohort, single-centre and drawn from healthy volunteers, so it is one Indian cohort and never the Indian prevalence, and an answer that promotes it to a national figure has overreached in a way an examiner can mark. The second is how not to combine them. The cohort's phenotypes were

predicted from genotype, while the biogeographic figures were modelled from reported allele frequencies under an equilibrium assumption, and the two were produced by different methods against different phenotype classifications. They can sit in the same discussion; they cannot sit in the same column as though one validated the other.

12.5 What a phenotype actually changes: the gene-drug pair

RULE **The unit of a pharmacogenomic decision is the gene-drug pair, not the gene.** A phenotype means nothing until a body has published an action for the specific drug in front of you, and those actions differ between drugs that share an enzyme, differ between the two ends of one enzyme's range, and are issued at different strengths. CPIC states the principle at its sharpest for the HLA locus: the comment on its carbamazepine recommendation table records that the HLA-B*15:02 test is recommended to guide the use of carbamazepine and oxcarbazepine only. That is the scope of that guideline rather than the whole current scope of the allele, because CPIC issues a separate phenytoin recommendation on the same allele, which is taught with the HLA testing and severe cutaneous reaction material.

PHENOTYPE	DRUG	PUBLISHED ACTION	STRENGTH
CYP2C19 poor metaboliser	citalopram, escitalopram	Consider an antidepressant not predominantly metabolised by CYP2C19; if citalopram or escitalopram remain clinically appropriate, consider a lower starting dose, slower titration and a 50% reduction of the standard maintenance dose	Strong
CYP2D6 poor metaboliser	paroxetine	A 50% reduction in the recommended starting dose, a slower titration schedule, and a 50% lower maintenance dose than in normal metabolisers	Moderate
CYP2D6 ultrarapid metaboliser	paroxetine	Select an alternative drug not predominantly metabolised by CYP2D6	Moderate
HLA-B*15:02 positive, carbamazepine-naive	carbamazepine	Do not use carbamazepine	Strong
HLA-A*31:01 positive, carbamazepine-naive	carbamazepine	Do not use carbamazepine if alternative agents are available	Strong

Read those as five separate instructions rather than as a pattern, because three of the differences between them are examined. The shape of the advice is drug-specific: for the pair metabolised by

CYP2C19 the recommendation leads with choosing a different antidepressant and only then offers a reduced dose, while for paroxetine at the slow end it leads with halving. The strength is drug-specific too, so a classification cannot be carried sideways from one agent to another even when the action is identical. And there is one instruction in this area that comes from outside CPIC's dose adjustments altogether: per the FDA warning quoted by CPIC, citalopram **20 mg/day** is the maximum recommended dose in CYP2C19 poor metabolisers, a ceiling set by the risk of QT prolongation rather than by any limit on antidepressant efficacy. That warning states the ceiling and no starting dose, because a restriction of this kind caps a regimen rather than opening one; where a poor metaboliser is actually being started, the instruction to work from is the CPIC row above, which asks for a lower starting dose and a slower titration without naming a figure for either. The logic underneath all of it is exposure. Less enzyme activity means more parent drug at the same milligram, which is why the published response is a smaller dose or a different drug rather than a different class.

IN INDIA

Because CYP2C19 poor metabolisers are several times commoner here than in the populations most dosing tables were built from, the CYP2C19 row of that table is the one that will alter practice most often. Where citalopram or escitalopram is the chosen antidepressant and a poor-metaboliser phenotype is known, the published instruction is a lower starting dose and a slower titration before any maintenance dose is settled, with the regulatory ceiling applying on top of it. Where the phenotype is unknown and cannot be tested, no phenotype may be read off ancestry: a higher group frequency does not make the patient in front of you a poor metaboliser, and an untested patient is started and titrated on ordinary clinical grounds rather than on a genotype-guided instruction.

12.6 Phenoconversion: when the prescription changes the phenotype

A genotype is fixed; the phenotype it predicts is not. CPIC records that paroxetine-associated **phenoconversion** of CYP2D6 normal metabolisers to intermediate or poor metabolisers, through autoinhibition of the enzyme, may occur, is dose-dependent, and is greater at steady-state concentrations. Read the modal exactly as written: may occur, not does. The clinically useful part is its shape. The drug the enzyme clears is also inhibiting that enzyme, so the phenotype printed on a report taken before treatment is not necessarily the phenotype the patient has once the drug has reached steady state, and the discrepancy grows with the dose.

Autoinhibition is only the tidiest example. The general case is any co-prescribed inhibitor of the same enzyme, which is why a genotype-guided plan has to be read against the current prescription list rather than in isolation. The full inhibitor and inducer matrix across the psychotropic classes is taught with the pharmacokinetic and pharmacodynamic drug interaction material and is not repeated here.

PITFALL

Treating a pharmacogenomic report as a permanent property of the patient. The report describes the genome; the phenotype line on it is a prediction, and that prediction can be moved by the drug being started or by a second drug already in the chart. Before explaining a non-response or an unexpected adverse effect by the genotype, read the prescription list, because a predicted normal metaboliser can behave like a poor one for reasons that have nothing to do with the report and everything to do with what else the patient is taking.

12.7 The HLA alleles: a test used to rule a drug out

The cytochrome tests adjust a dose. The HLA tests remove a drug, and that difference in what the result does is why they are examined together and answered differently. The CPIC HLA-B frequency table gives HLA-B*15:02 a Central/South Asian **allele frequency** of **2.6%**, an East Asian frequency of 4.6% and a European frequency of 0.0000655, that last figure being the table's raw proportion and not a percentage. Two things must be said with those numbers. They are allele frequencies and not carrier frequencies, which is a different quantity that these figures do not give; and the South Asian value, while below the East Asian one, is enormously above the European one, so the familiar teaching that this is an East Asian allele is only half true in an Indian clinic.

The unusual property of the test sits at its negative end. CPIC records that HLA-B*15:02 carries a **100% negative predictive value** for carbamazepine-induced SJS/TEN. That figure is stated flatly in the comment on CPIC's carbamazepine recommendation table, for that reaction with that drug, and it is what makes the allele function as a rule-out rather than a risk score: a negative result greatly reduces the risk of that reaction with that drug rather than abolishing it, and a positive result is a stop rather than a caution. Carbamazepine-associated Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis are also reported with other B75 alleles that a single-allele assay does not read, so a negative assay is not a negative patient. It is also why the recommendation is issued with a restriction written into it rather than as a general test of anticonvulsant safety.

HLA-A*31:01 is a second and separate carbamazepine risk allele that does not carry the same consequences as the first, and those differences are precisely what is asked. Its risk spans SJS/TEN, DRESS and MPE, not SJS/TEN alone, so it predicts a wider reaction spectrum including a maculopapular exanthem. Its stopping rule is conditional where the other is absolute: in a carbamazepine-naive patient the instruction is not to use carbamazepine if alternative agents are available. That conditional clause is the discriminator between the two alleles and is worth reproducing in those words rather than paraphrased into a flat prohibition.

For Indian practice the association itself has been quantified. A meta-analysis of Indians from Malaysia and India demonstrated a significant and strong association between HLA-B*15:02 and carbamazepine-induced SJS/TEN, with an odds ratio of 38.54 (95% CI 6.83 to 217.34). The interval teaches as much as the point estimate. The effect is large and the sample it rests on is small, so the finding argues for testing rather than for quoting a precise risk to a patient.

IN INDIA

A low group allele frequency is a poor reason to skip this test, because the frequency describes a population and the reaction happens to an individual. The pharmacogenomic argument runs the other way: the allele is present here at a frequency that is not negligible, the association in Indian patients is strong, and the test's real yield is the negative result it returns to the great majority who are not carriers. Where carbamazepine is the drug being started and the assay is obtainable, that is the moment at which the result changes the prescription. The severe cutaneous reactions themselves, and the wider testing framework reaching phenytoin and oxcarbazepine, are taught with the HLA testing and severe cutaneous reaction material.

12.8 Ancestry, dose requirement and the honest Indian position

Some of what a genotype is invoked to explain is already visible before anyone is genotyped. The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines record that much lower doses of clozapine are required in East Asians, Indians and Bangladeshis, and that the prevalence of clozapine poor metabolisers is also higher in East Asians. An Indian exploratory study puts a figure on the first half of that: the median clozapine **concentration to dose ratio** in its sample was 2.5 against a published weighted mean of 1.07 for Caucasians, about two and a half times higher.

Both halves of that pairing need discipline. The Indian figure is a concentration observation and not a genotype finding: no variant is named as its cause, and attributing it to a particular cytochrome polymorphism goes beyond what was reported. It is also a single exploratory sample compared against published means rather than against a concurrent control group. What it licenses is the caution that a milligram may not mean here what it meant in the population a dosing table was derived from. The plasma concentration itself, its target range and when the sample is drawn belong with the therapeutic drug monitoring material and are not restated here.

The Indian guideline position is deliberately restrained, and it is the right note to close on. The Indian Psychiatric Society schizophrenia guideline states that **psycho-pharmacogenomic studies**, focusing on cytochrome P450 enzymes, may be helpful in three situations:

- treatment-resistant positive symptoms;
- antipsychotic intolerance;
- frequent relapse despite reported fair medication adherence.

The same guideline then states that the clinical utility of psycho-pharmacogenomics is disputable, because of the lack of larger standardised trials and cost-effectiveness evaluations, and that where such testing is conducted the decisions must always be integrated with other clinical factors. Notice what that position is and is not. It is a judgement about the evidence base and about economic evaluation, and it is stated in a guideline rather than inferred. It is not a statement about which laboratories in the country run these assays, what they cost, or how long they take, and an answer that supplies those details is supplying them from somewhere other than the guideline.

MNEMONIC

Allele, Agent, Ancestry, Action

Four questions before a pharmacogenomic result changes anything: which allele or phenotype has actually been reported, which agent the published recommendation was written for, which population the frequency being quoted was measured or modelled in, and what action a named body has actually published for that pair. A result that fails any one of the four settles nothing.

A pharmacogenomic result is a gene, a drug, a population and a published action: without all four it changes no prescription.

Interactions and prescribing in physical illness

13 · Pharmacokinetic and pharmacodynamic drug-drug interactions of psychotropics

A psychotropic almost never meets a patient alone. The second drug is the commonest second variable here, and three questions are asked of every pair: by what mechanism does one agent reach the other, in which direction does the concentration or the effect move, and how long does the change take to declare itself. Marks are lost by treating every interaction as an enzyme problem, by naming an isoenzyme without committing to a direction, and by assuming a mechanism that is real must also be clinically operative. Half-life, steady state, therapeutic index and the enzymology itself belong to the Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes; what follows is the cross-class application, on the enzymatic mechanisms and on the equally examinable mechanisms that have no enzyme in them at all.

13.1 The two axes, and why the second is not the lesser one

Kaplan and Sadock draw the line at the plasma concentration. A **pharmacokinetic** interaction is one drug changing what another drug's plasma concentration turns out to be; a **pharmacodynamic** interaction is one drug changing another's biologic activity. The second definition turns on activity, not on constancy of concentration, so a single pair can sit on both axes at once. Defining that axis as an interaction in which the level does not move imports a condition the standard text does not impose.

RULE **Name the mechanism before naming the drug.** Every interaction here resolves to one of four mechanism families: altered metabolism by a cytochrome or a conjugating enzyme, altered renal elimination, displacement from plasma protein binding, and additive or opposing action at a shared endpoint. The first three move a concentration and are pharmacokinetic; the fourth need not, and is pharmacodynamic.

13.2 Grading an inhibitor and an inducer, and which psychotropics qualify

Strong and moderate are regulatory definitions, not clinical impressions. Both are fixed by what the perturbing drug does to the area under the concentration-time curve of a sensitive **index**

substrate: an inhibitor is graded by how far it raises that exposure, an inducer by how far it lowers it. Induction is graded by loss and inhibition by gain, which keeps the two ladders apart.

5-fold or more	2 to under 5-fold	80 per cent fall or more	50 to under 80 per cent
STRONG INHIBITOR	MODERATE INHIBITOR	STRONG INDUCER	MODERATE INDUCER

The psychotropics at the top of the inhibitor ladder are ordinary drugs. Fluoxetine and paroxetine are the two clinical index strong inhibitors of CYP2D6 named by the FDA, and fluoxetine is a strong inhibitor of CYP2C19 as well, making it a two-enzyme inhibitor rather than a CYP2D6-only one. Fluvoxamine is the index strong inhibitor for both CYP1A2 and CYP2C19, and the same footnote grades it a moderate CYP3A inhibitor and a weak CYP2D6 inhibitor. Three of the commonest selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors therefore carry three different inhibition fingerprints, and knowing the class tells you none of them.

- Carbamazepine is a strong inducer of CYP3A and of CYP2B6 and a weak inducer of CYP2C9.
- The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines additionally mark carbamazepine and phenobarbital as predominant-pathway inducers of CYP1A2, while the FDA selects no index inducer at all for that isoenzyme; since the FDA table is not exhaustive, that is silence rather than contradiction, and the direction is taught under the Maudsley name.
- No inducer of CYP2D6 is known: the Maudsley inducer column for that isoenzyme reads not known, and it is the only column left empty. Absence of an identified inducer is not a demonstration that the enzyme cannot be induced.

13.3 The substrate side, and why one enzyme reaches several classes

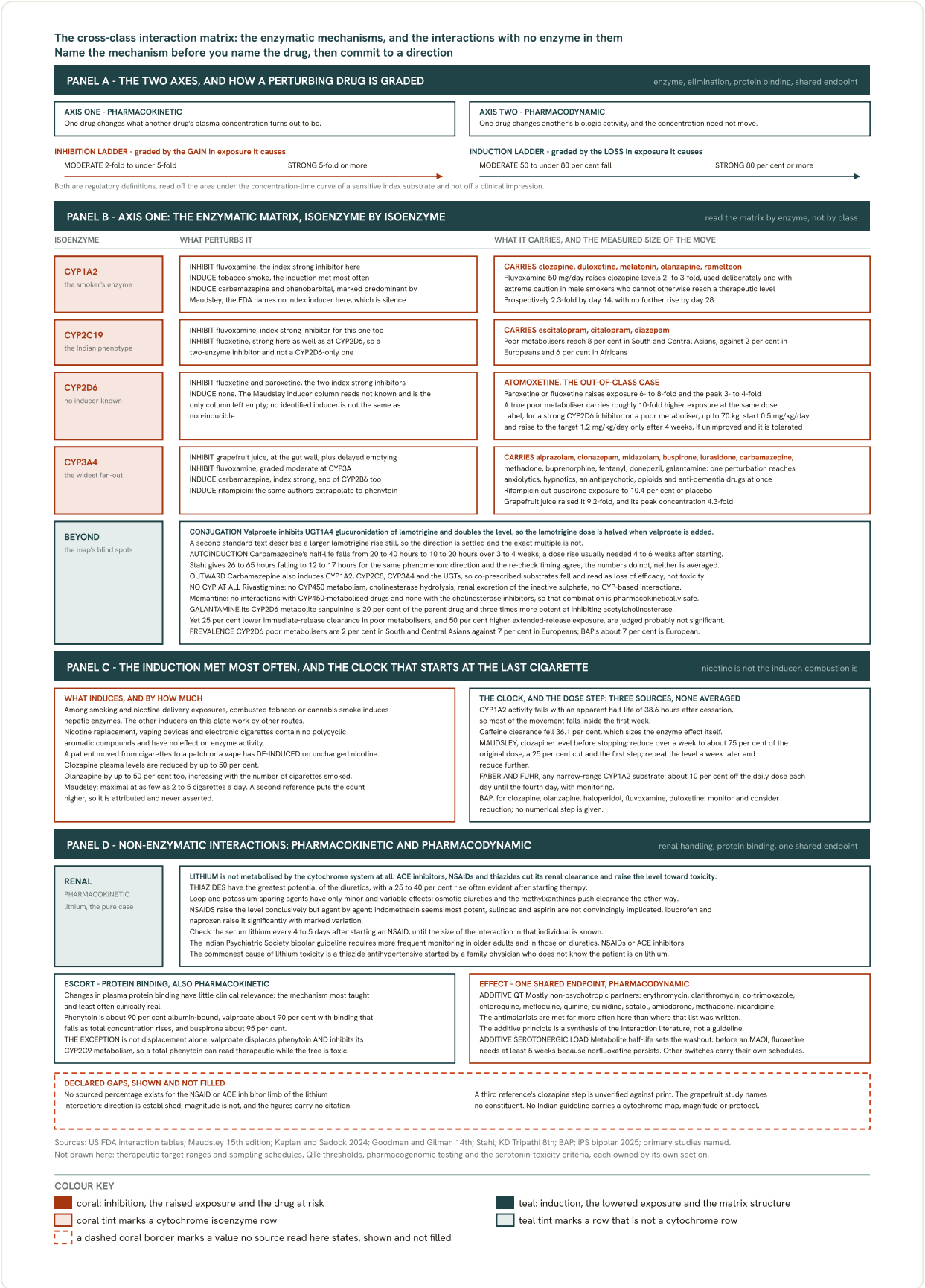


Fig 37.6 The cross-class interaction matrix, on both of its axes. The enzymatic half is read isoenzyme by isoenzyme: what inhibits it, what induces it, what it carries, and the measured size of the move, with conjugation, autoinduction, the agents that have no cytochrome involvement at all, and the population prevalences beneath it. The non-enzymatic half is the one a habit-written answer omits: renal handling with lithium and protein-binding

displacement with its one exception, both pharmacokinetic, and additive action at a shared endpoint, pharmacodynamic.

An inhibitor list is half a prediction. The other half is the substrate map, and a single perturbation fans out widely because the substrates of one isoenzyme are drawn from several therapeutic classes at once. The Maudsley guidelines mark clozapine, duloxetine, melatonin, olanzapine and ramelteon as predominant-pathway CYP1A2 substrates. Their CYP3A4 substrate cell is wider still, carrying alprazolam, clonazepam and midazolam, buspirone, lurasidone, carbamazepine itself, methadone, buprenorphine and fentanyl, and donepezil and galantamine. One CYP3A4 perturbation therefore reaches the anxiolytics, the hypnotics, an antipsychotic, the opioids and the anti-dementia drugs at once, which is the argument for reading the matrix by enzyme rather than by class. The accompanying figure sets out both of its axes together.

13.4 Tobacco smoke, and the clock that starts at the last cigarette

The induction a psychiatrist meets most often is not a drug. Among smoking and nicotine-delivery exposures, the Maudsley position is that combusted smoke induces hepatic enzymes in the manner its own table describes, that this covers cigarettes and cannabis or tobacco joints, and that nicotine replacement, vaping devices and electronic cigarettes do not reproduce that smoke-mediated induction. The footnote attributes that to their containing no **polycyclic aromatic compounds**. Smoking reduces clozapine plasma levels by **up to 50 per cent**, and olanzapine levels by up to 50 per cent as well, that effect increasing with the number of cigarettes smoked. For clozapine the same guideline records that the effect may be maximal at as few as 2 to 5 cigarettes a day; a second standard reference puts the threshold higher, and because the sources disagree the count must be attributed rather than asserted.

TRAP **Treating nicotine as the inducer.** Nicotine replacement, vaping devices and electronic cigarettes contain no polycyclic aromatic compounds and have no effect on enzyme activity, so a patient moved from cigarettes to a patch or a vape has de-induced despite unchanged nicotine intake. The same is true of the smoker admitted to a smoke-free ward. Locating the induction in nicotine predicts no change and misses the rise, which is exactly the stem built around a planned admission or a cessation attempt.

De-induction is quick without being instantaneous. Caffeine phenotyping in heavy smokers put the apparent half-life of the fall in CYP1A2 activity at **38.6 hours**, so most of the movement falls inside the first week; in the same study stopping smoking cut caffeine clearance by 36.1 per cent, which sizes the enzyme effect rather than the effect on any one drug. The participants were few and none were Indian, and that limit travels with the number. Three references address the dose step itself and none agree, so each is attributed and none averaged into the others.

SOURCE, AND THE DRUGS IT SCOPES	THE DOSE STEP ON STOPPING SMOKING	THE MEASUREMENT THAT GOES WITH IT
The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines, for clozapine	Reduce gradually over a week until around 75 per cent of the original dose is reached, which is a 25 per cent cut and the first step rather than the destination	Take a plasma level before stopping, repeat it a week after stopping, and expect to reduce further
Faber and Fuhr, for any CYP1A2 substrate of narrow therapeutic range	A stepwise daily reduction of approximately 10 per cent until the fourth day after cessation, proposed as a rule of thumb	Accompanied throughout by therapeutic drug monitoring
BAP, for clozapine, olanzapine, haloperidol, fluvoxamine and duloxetine	Monitor and consider dose reduction of the CYP1A2-metabolised drug; no numerical step is specified	Guided by therapeutic drug monitoring
A third standard reference, for clozapine	A different step again, on a different tempo; its figures could not be verified against the printed text and are not reproduced	Not stated here

13.5 Inhibition used on purpose, met by accident, or carried in the genome

Fluvoxamine and clozapine is the case in which the inhibition is the point. The evidence in schizophrenia is that co-prescribing fluvoxamine at a dose as low as 50 mg/day raises clozapine levels 2- to 3-fold, and the combination is used deliberately, with extreme caution, in male smokers who cannot otherwise reach therapeutic levels. The magnitude is confirmed prospectively: mean plasma clozapine rose 2.3-fold at 14 days of combined treatment, with no further elevation at 28 days, so the new plateau arrives inside a fortnight. Used without a measured level, the strategy inverts its own safety logic, because the inhibition is then being relied on blind.

Buspirone demonstrates the same axis in both directions and at full amplitude. Rifampicin cut buspirone exposure to **10.4 per cent of placebo**, effectively abolishing the drug, and the same authors name carbamazepine and phenytoin as potent CYP3A4 inducers with the same consequence, which is their extrapolation rather than a measured comparison. Inhibition runs the other way just as hard: grapefruit juice raised buspirone exposure 9.2-fold and its peak concentration 4.3-fold in healthy volunteers, by inhibiting intestinal CYP3A4-mediated first-pass metabolism and delaying gastric emptying. The primary study attributes the effect to the juice as a whole and identifies no constituent, so naming one is an overreach.

Atomoxetine makes CYP2D6 concrete outside the antidepressants. Adding paroxetine or fluoxetine to a normal metaboliser raises atomoxetine exposure roughly 6- to 8-fold and its peak concentration about 3- to 4-fold, converting the patient pharmacokinetically into a poor metaboliser, and a true **poor metaboliser** carries roughly 10-fold higher exposure than a normal metaboliser at the same nominal dose. The label treats the two conditions as one. In children and adolescents up to 70 kg on a strong CYP2D6 inhibitor such as paroxetine, fluoxetine or

quinidine, or in known poor metabolisers, atomoxetine for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is started at 0.5 mg/kg/day and increased to the usual target of 1.2 mg/kg/day only if symptoms have not improved after 4 weeks and the starting dose is well tolerated.

Genotype is the standing version of the same inhibition, and the prevalences disagree by source and ancestry. The BAP attention deficit hyperactivity disorder guideline gives CYP2D6 poor metabolisers as about 7 per cent, while the Maudsley guidelines separate the populations and give 2 per cent in South and Central Asians against 7 per cent in Europeans, so the first figure is a European one wearing no label. Allele-level testing and its interpretation are taught in the section of these notes on pharmacogenomics in psychiatry.

IN INDIA

The two polymorphisms point in opposite directions in this population. CYP2C19 poor metabolism reaches **8 per cent** in South and Central Asians, against 2 per cent in Europeans and 6 per cent in Africans, which matters for escitalopram, citalopram and diazepam. Stacking a strong CYP2C19 inhibitor, fluvoxamine or fluoxetine, on one of those agents compounds a common phenotype with a strong inhibitor, so anticipate higher exposure and follow the substrate-specific label or guideline for avoidance, dose reduction, slower titration or monitoring. CYP2D6 runs the other way: poor-metaboliser status is reported less often in South and Central Asians than in Europeans, but genotype and co-prescribed inhibitor both remain clinically relevant and may combine to raise exposure, and the inhibitor is the limb the prescriber can always see.

13.6 Autoinduction, and the drugs with no cytochrome problem at all

Carbamazepine induces its own metabolism. Its half-life falls from 20 to 40 hours down to 10 to 20 hours over 3 to 4 weeks of regular dosing, and the dose usually has to be increased about 4 to 6 weeks after starting to hold the same concentration. Stahl's guide gives different figures for the same phenomenon, an initial half-life of 26 to 65 hours falling to 12 to 17 hours with repeated dosing; direction and the timing of the re-check are agreed across the sources, the numbers are not, and printing either as the figure is an error. **Autoinduction** is also outward-facing: carbamazepine induces CYP1A2, CYP2C8, CYP3A4 and the conjugating UGT enzymes, so co-prescribed substrates of those pathways fall in concentration over the same weeks and present as loss of efficacy rather than as toxicity.

Not every drug has a cytochrome problem. Rivastigmine is the pharmacokinetic outlier of the cholinesterase inhibitors: no CYP450 metabolism, clearance by cholinesterase-mediated hydrolysis with renal excretion of the inactive sulphate metabolite, and therefore no CYP-based drug interactions. Memantine records no interactions with drugs metabolised by CYP450 enzymes and none with the cholinesterase inhibitors, which is what makes the combination pharmacokinetically safe. Galantamine is the counterexample inside the same class: it is metabolised by CYP2D6 and CYP3A4, and its CYP2D6 metabolite **sanguinine** accounts for 20 per cent of the parent drug and is three times more potent than galantamine at producing acetylcholinesterase inhibition. Even there the polymorphism is judged not to matter: Kaplan and Sadock call a 25 per cent decrease in clearance of the immediate-release form in poor

metabolisers, and 50 per cent higher exposure with the extended-release form, probably not significant given the large interpatient variability in galantamine disposition. Hold that beside atomoxetine, where the same enzyme carries the opposite verdict: a polymorphism can be real and still not actionable.

GOOD TO REMEMBER

When a patient with dementia is already established on an enzyme inducer or a strong inhibitor, choosing the cholinesterase inhibitor that is not metabolised by the cytochrome system removes the interaction instead of managing it, and memantine adds nothing to the burden either. That is a decision available at the first prescription, not a monitoring plan bolted on later.

13.7 Non-enzymatic interactions: lithium and the kidney

Lithium is the purest case on this side of the matrix, because it is not metabolised by the cytochrome system at all and its interactions are renal. Kaplan and Sadock state that angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitors, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and thiazides decrease the renal clearance of lithium and increase the likelihood of severe elevation. The diuretics do not behave alike. Thiazides have the greatest potential of the diuretics to raise lithium, with a **25 to 40 per cent** rise often evident after starting therapy, whereas loop diuretics and potassium-sparing agents have only minor and variable effects, and osmotic diuretics and methylxanthines push clearance the other way and were historically advocated as antidotes for lithium toxicity. No percentage is available for the ACE inhibitor limb: the direction is established and the magnitude is not.

The NSAID limb is agent-dependent in a way the class name hides, and the whole of the account here rests on one paper, named so that a reader can weigh it: Ragheb's review in the Journal of Clinical Psychopharmacology in 1990. Ragheb's review states there is conclusive evidence that these drugs can increase serum lithium levels, diminish renal lithium clearance and possibly induce lithium toxicity, that the effect varies greatly between agents with indomethacin seeming most potent, that sulindac and aspirin are not convincingly implicated, and that ibuprofen and naproxen can raise levels significantly but with marked interindividual variation. No percentage belongs here either: the primary review gives none and the figures in circulation disagree and carry no citation. The review does give a monitoring rule, that a patient on lithium started on one of these drugs should have the serum level checked every 4 to 5 days until the extent of the interaction in that individual is known. The Indian Psychiatric Society bipolar guideline reaches the same place from the other direction, requiring more frequent monitoring in older adults and in those on diuretics, NSAIDs or ACE inhibitors. Target concentrations and the routine sampling schedule are taught in the section of these notes on therapeutic drug monitoring, and lithium toxicity as an entity in the section on the other psychotropic emergencies.

PITFALL

Kaplan and Sadock name the commonest cause of lithium toxicity today as a thiazide antihypertensive started by a family physician who is unaware the patient is under psychiatric care with lithium. It is not created in the psychiatry clinic and cannot be intercepted there, so the warning has to travel with the patient rather than sit in the record.

13.8 Protein binding, conjugation, and the pharmacodynamic axis

Displacement is the mechanism most taught and least often clinically real. The reference position, and the title of the paper that argues it, is that changes in plasma protein binding have little clinical relevance. The figures that make the teaching concrete are unremarkable in themselves: phenytoin is about 90 per cent albumin-bound, valproate about 90 per cent with binding that falls as the total concentration rises, and buspirone about 95 per cent. High protein binding predicts a theoretical interaction, not a clinical one.

TRAP **Reading a therapeutic total phenytoin as a safe phenytoin when valproate is on board.** Valproate displaces phenytoin from albumin and inhibits its CYP2C9 metabolism, so total phenytoin can read therapeutic while free phenytoin is toxic. Displacement alone carries little clinical relevance; displacement combined with inhibition of the same drug's metabolism is the exception that proves the rule, and the Indian standard text makes the same point. Where a free assay is not obtainable, the diagnosis is made from the patient rather than from the report.

Conjugation is the other enzymatic pathway the cytochrome map does not show. Valproate inhibits the UGT1A4 **glucuronidation** of lamotrigine and doubles the lamotrigine level, so the lamotrigine dose is halved when valproate is co-prescribed; a second standard text describes a larger rise still, so the direction is settled and the exact multiple is not.

Two pharmacodynamic stacks carry most of the marks. The first is additive QT prolongation, whose commonest partners in a psychiatric patient are non-psychotropic: erythromycin and clarithromycin, co-trimoxazole, chloroquine, mefloquine and quinine, quinidine, sotalol and amiodarone, methadone and nicardipine. The antimalarials on that list are met far more often here than in the practice it was written for, which changes which partner a psychiatrist encounters. Thresholds and monitoring belong to the section of these notes on QTc prolongation and cardiometabolic monitoring; the additive principle is a synthesis of the interaction literature rather than a guideline position, and is worth stating as such. The second stack is additive serotonergic load, where the arithmetic is set by metabolite half-life rather than by parent half-life: before a monoamine oxidase inhibitor is started after fluoxetine, allow a **washout** of at least 5 weeks because norfluoxetine persists, and an interaction with a serotonergic agent remains possible over that same period after the parent drug has gone. Other serotonergic switches carry their own schedules and do not inherit this interval. Serotonin toxicity itself, with its precipitants, its named criteria and its pharmacological management, is taught in its own section of these notes.

MNEMONIC

Enzyme, Elimination, Escort, Effect

The four families, in the order worth checking them in front of a prescription. Enzyme: is either drug a substrate, inhibitor or inducer of a pathway the other uses. Elimination: does either change the renal handling of the other. Escort: is one displaced from plasma protein binding, with a second mechanism alongside. Effect: do both act on one endpoint, whether or not either concentration moves. A pair on two lines is the dangerous one.

One limitation belongs in any answer built on this material. The enzymatic axis rests on regulatory tables, United Kingdom and United States reference texts and primary pharmacokinetic studies; no Indian guideline carries a cytochrome map, an interaction magnitude or a screening protocol. Say so rather than imply otherwise.

Predict from the mechanism, not from the class: ask which enzyme, which kidney, which binding site and which endpoint the two drugs share, and only then ask which way the number moves.

14 · Psychotropic prescribing in cardiac, hepatic and renal disease

A psychotropic prescription in organ disease is two decisions, not one. The first is ordinary: which drug the disorder needs. The second is what the failing organ does to that drug, or what the drug does to that organ, and the marks are almost entirely for the second. The three organs ask three different questions. The liver principally decides how much of a dose survives to circulate and how fast it is destroyed. The kidney principally decides how much of it leaves. The heart chiefly decides what a given concentration does to conduction, contractility and rhythm, although heart failure can also alter exposure itself through reduced perfusion, hepatic congestion and impaired renal clearance. Candidates lose marks by answering all three with a single list of safe drugs, and by carrying an agent that is the right answer in one organ into the organ where it is the wrong one.

14.1 Reading the organ, not the number

The commonest error at the start is to treat the routine blood test as a measure of the organ's working capacity. The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines in Psychiatry state plainly that liver function tests are a poor marker of **hepatic metabolising capacity** and not a measure of it: they help evaluate hepatic damage, but tell us little about hepatic function. A patient with grossly deranged transaminases may clear a drug normally, and a patient with a near-normal panel and a shrunken cirrhotic liver may not.

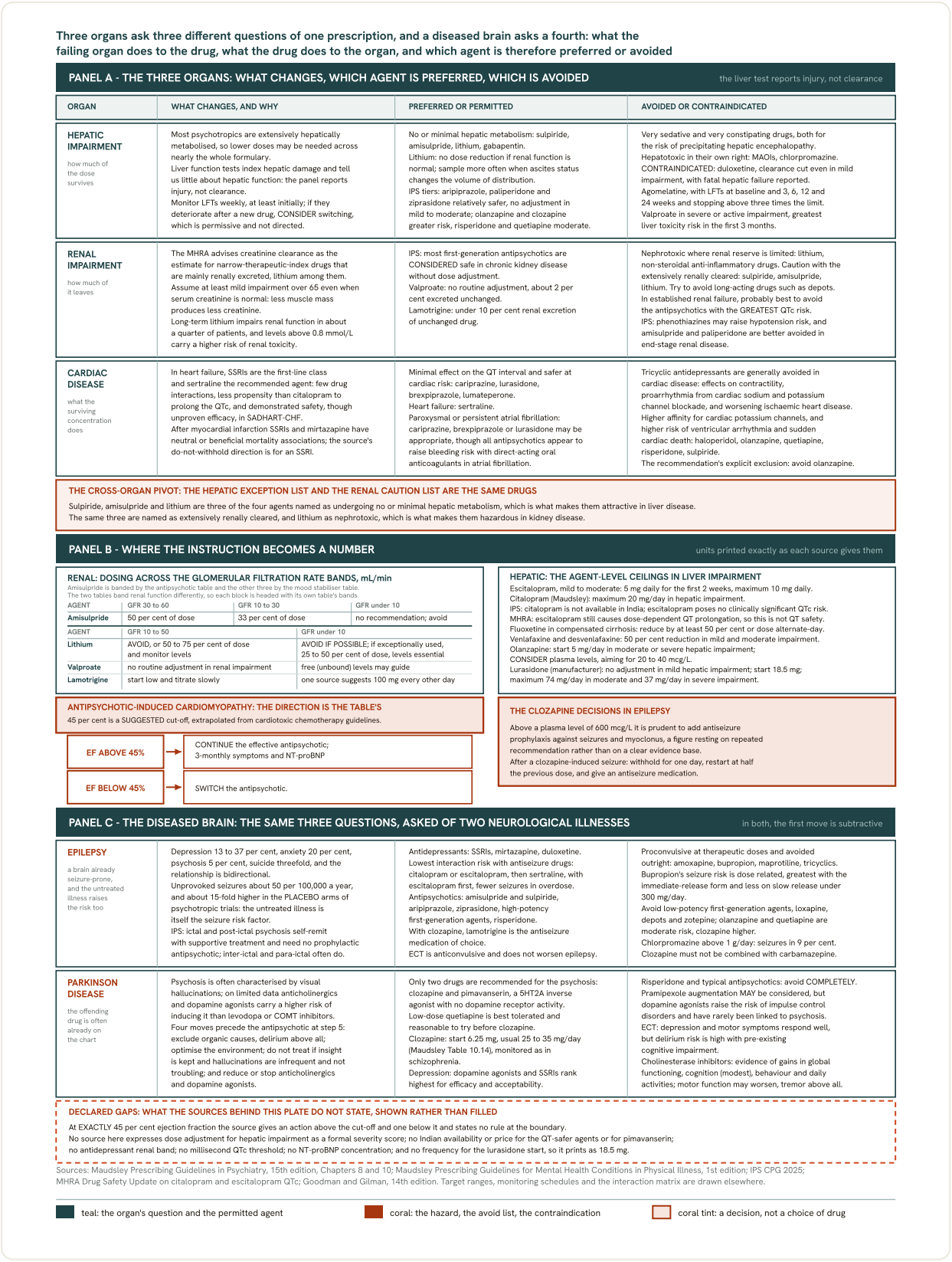


Fig 37.7 Prescribing in cardiac, hepatic and renal disease, and in epilepsy and Parkinson disease. The liver principally influences how much of a dose is destroyed, the kidney how much leaves and the heart what the surviving concentration does, though each organ works both axes and heart failure may also alter clearance and distribution. Sulpiride, amisulpride and lithium sit on the hepatic exception list and the renal caution list at once. In suspected antipsychotic-induced cardiomyopathy the source table continues above an ejection fraction of 45 per cent and switches below it, the cut-off only suggested and no rule stated at the boundary. In both neurological illnesses the first move is subtractive. (Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines in Psychiatry, 15th edition; Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines for Mental Health Conditions in Physical Illness, 1st edition; Indian Psychiatric Society clinical practice guidelines 2025.)

RULE **The liver test reports injury; it does not report clearance.** Nothing in the standard panel measures how much cytochrome capacity remains, which is why the hepatic dose adjustments below are keyed to a clinical description rather than to a laboratory value: many agent-level adjustments are expressed as mild, moderate or severe impairment, and others as compensated cirrhosis, active disease, ascites, or hepatic impairment generally. These guidelines do not express psychotropic dose adjustment in terms of a formal hepatic severity score at all, so an answer that offers dose bands by severity class is offering something they do not contain.

That matters because **most psychotropics are extensively hepatically metabolised**, so lower doses may be required across nearly the whole formulary. The Maudsley guidelines name the exceptions that undergo no or minimal hepatic metabolism: sulpiride, amisulpride, lithium and gabapentin. Commit that short list, because it is the pivot of the commonest cross-organ trap in this topic.

The renal question is answered differently. The Maudsley guidelines report that the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, a United Kingdom regulator and not an Indian one, advises that **creatinine clearance** be used as an estimate of renal function for direct-acting oral anticoagulants and for narrow-therapeutic-index drugs that are mainly renally excreted, lithium among them. The reasoning is portable even so: the estimate a laboratory prints by default is not necessarily the estimate a narrow-index drug should be dosed against. The underlying kinetics of half-life, clearance and therapeutic index belong to the Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes.

14.2 Hepatic impairment: what to avoid, and the watch that follows

Three avoidance rules run across classes in hepatic impairment, and each carries its own reason. Very sedative drugs and very constipating drugs are avoided because of the risk of precipitating **hepatic encephalopathy**, and drugs known to be hepatotoxic in their own right are avoided because the liver is already the injured organ. The Maudsley guidelines give monoamine oxidase inhibitors and chlorpromazine as their examples of the third.

MNEMONIC

Sedating, Constipating, Hepatotoxic

The three properties that disqualify a psychotropic in liver disease, and the first two disqualify it for the same reason: both push an encephalopathy-prone patient towards encephalopathy, one by depressing consciousness directly and one by loading the gut with nitrogen.

The positive instruction is to choose a low-risk drug and monitor liver function tests weekly, at least initially, and it does not direct a switch if they deteriorate: after a new drug is introduced the guideline says only to *consider* switching to another drug. Read that modal exactly. It is permissive, not mandatory, and the reason is the one above: a rising transaminase is a signal about injury, not a verdict on the drug, and the alternative agent may be worse for this patient.

Some sense of how often that signal appears is essential, because an abnormal result is close to routine rather than rare.

One-third	4%	0.5 to 3%
ANY ABNORMAL LFT ON AN ANTIPSYCHOTIC	AT OVER THREE TIMES THE UPPER LIMIT	TRANSAMINASE RISE ON AN ANTIDEPRESSANT

The antipsychotic abnormalities usually appear within 1 to 6 weeks of initiation, and transaminases are most often the affected fraction. The antidepressant elevations are asymptomatic and mild, appear anywhere between several days and 6 months of initiation, and older patients are more vulnerable. Both timings matter, but they change the probability of drug-induced injury rather than settling it: a derangement found at a routine annual test in a patient stable on treatment for years is less likely to be the psychotropic's doing, and one found six weeks in is more likely to be, yet neither latency proves nor excludes the drug. Delayed and chronic presentations occur, so assess the baseline result, the competing causes, the biochemical pattern and the course after withdrawal before attributing the abnormality to the prescription.

14.3 Antidepressants and mood stabilisers in liver disease

Below the class principles sit agent-level instructions, and these are what a stem tests.

AGENT	WHAT HEPATIC IMPAIRMENT DOES TO THE PRESCRIPTION
Escitalopram	Initiate at 5 mg daily for the first 2 weeks in mild to moderate hepatic impairment, maximum **10 mg daily**.
Fluoxetine	Accumulates in compensated cirrhosis; a dose reduction of at least 50 per cent, or alternate-day dosing, is recommended in hepatic impairment, and time to steady state is delayed.
Venlafaxine and desvenlafaxine	Require a 50 per cent dose reduction in mild and moderate hepatic impairment.
Duloxetine	Contraindicated in hepatic impairment; clearance is markedly reduced even in mild impairment and fatal hepatic failure has been reported.
Agomelatine	Contraindicated in hepatic impairment; liver function tests at baseline and at 3, 6, 12 and 24 weeks during initiation and at each dose increase, stopping if transaminases rise more than three times the upper limit of normal.
Valproate	Contraindicated in severe or active hepatic impairment, or where there is a family history of severe impairment, with the greatest risk of liver toxicity falling in the first 3 months of treatment.

The valproate row is the one with the most Indian consequence, because sodium valproate and divalproex are the mood stabilisers most reachable on cost, and alcohol-related liver disease is exactly the population in which a mood stabiliser is often wanted.

TRAP **Two guideline bodies say different things about citalopram, and neither is wrong.** The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines direct that citalopram's daily dose in hepatic impairment be restricted to a maximum of **20 mg/day**. That entry gives the figure as a restriction on the daily dose and stops; no starting dose accompanies it, so a candidate who recites the ceiling has recited the whole of what the guideline states here. The Indian Psychiatric Society depression guideline states that citalopram can prolong the QTc interval and is not available in India, whereas escitalopram does not pose a clinically significant risk of QTc prolongation. Print that second clause as the guideline's wording, not as a clean bill of health, and correct it as you print it: the United Kingdom medicines regulator's safety advice on the two drugs is that escitalopram also causes dose-dependent QT-interval prolongation. Its effect is generally smaller than citalopram's, but it is not clinically absent, and the usual contraindications and precautions still apply, particularly with cardiac disease, electrolyte disturbance, high exposure or another QT-prolonging drug. A candidate who learns only the British ceiling quotes a limit for an agent the Indian guideline says is not marketed here; one who learns only the Indian statement is caught by a question written from a British text. Attribute each position to the body that issues it and print both.

GOOD TO REMEMBER

Lithium is not hepatically metabolised, so no dose reduction is required in hepatic impairment as long as renal function is normal. The dose does not move, but the sampling discipline does: monitor levels more frequently if ascites status changes, because the **volume of distribution** changes with it. A patient tapped for ascites has not had their dose altered, but they have had their pharmacokinetics altered.

14.4 Antipsychotics in liver disease

Two agents carry usable numbers. The Maudsley guidelines note that although olanzapine is extensively hepatically metabolised, its pharmacokinetics seem to change little in severe hepatic impairment; they nonetheless advise starting at 5 mg/day in moderate or severe hepatic impairment and considering plasma levels to guide dosage, aiming for 20 to 40 mcg/L. For lurasidone, the manufacturer recommends no dose adjustment in mild hepatic impairment, a starting dose of 18.5 mg in moderate or severe hepatic impairment, and a maximum of 74 mg/day in moderate and 37 mg/day in severe hepatic impairment. Set the two rows against each other, because their shapes differ and the difference is the source's rather than an omission here. The olanzapine row fixes where to begin and then hands the rest to a concentration, and it names no milligram maximum at all, which is why the target range and not a dose is the thing to quote from it. The lurasidone row does name maxima, and separate ones for each grade of impairment.

IN INDIA

The Indian Psychiatric Society schizophrenia guideline grades antipsychotic hepatotoxicity in tiers rather than drug by drug, which makes it faster to use at the bedside. Olanzapine and clozapine pose a greater risk and risperidone and quetiapine a moderate risk, while aripiprazole, paliperidone and ziprasidone have relatively safer profiles and need no dosage adjustment in mild to moderate hepatic impairment. That last group is the practical starting point when a patient with liver disease needs an antipsychotic and the prescriber wants one decision rather than a table.

Note the difference in method between the two documents. The British source rates the individual drug and attaches a number to it; the Indian source rates the group and names a safer set. Neither contradicts the other, and an answer that supplies the agent-level ceiling and the group-level preference has covered the question from both directions.

14.5 Renal impairment: which estimate, and in whom

The renal patient is frequently the unrecognised renal patient. The Maudsley guidelines instruct that older adults over 65 be assumed to have at least mild renal impairment even when serum creatinine is normal, because a smaller muscle mass produces less creatinine and therefore a falsely reassuring value. The impairment is present; the marker has simply failed to report it.

> **PITFALL**
>
> Reading a normal serum creatinine in a frail older adult as normal renal function, and leaving a renally cleared psychotropic at the dose that suited the patient a decade ago. The prescription has not changed and the number on the report has not changed, so nothing prompts review, and the concentration climbs anyway. The same failure occurs in reverse when renal function falls acutely and the drug chart is not revisited.

Three general principles then organise the choice of agent:

- Avoid drugs that are **nephrotoxic**, lithium and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs among them, where renal reserve is limited.
- Be cautious with drugs that are extensively renally cleared, such as sulpiride, amisulpride and lithium.
- Try to avoid long-acting drugs such as depot preparations, which cannot be withdrawn once administered.

A fourth principle is to try to avoid drugs known to prolong the QTc interval, and it is narrowed usefully for the sickest patients: in established renal failure, where electrolyte changes are common, it is probably best to avoid the antipsychotics with the greatest risk of QTc prolongation, not every drug that prolongs it at all. Read that as written: a prohibition on every agent with any QTc effect would exclude almost the entire class.

TRAP **The hepatic exception list and the renal caution list are the same drugs.** Sulpiride and amisulpride are named as escaping hepatic metabolism, which makes them attractive in liver disease, and they are named again as extensively renally cleared, which makes them hazardous in kidney disease. Lithium sits on both lists for the same reason. A candidate who memorises one list and reaches for it in the other organ has been set up by the pharmacology itself: a drug avoids one route of elimination precisely by depending on the other.

14.6 Dosing by glomerular filtration rate

Where the renal instruction becomes quantitative, it is banded rather than continuous.

AGENT	RENAL HANDLING	DOSING ACROSS THE BANDS
Amisulpride	Extensively renally cleared	In renal impairment, 50 per cent of the dose at a GFR of 30 to 60 mL/min and 33 per cent at 10 to 30 mL/min; no recommendation exists below 10 mL/min, so it is best avoided in established renal failure.
Lithium	Nephrotoxic; 95 per cent excreted unchanged in urine, and contraindicated by the manufacturer in severe renal impairment	At a GFR of 10 to 50 mL/min, avoid, or reduce to 50 to 75 per cent of the normal dose and monitor serum levels; below 10 mL/min, avoid if possible, and only if it is used exceptionally reduce to 25 to 50 per cent, with level monitoring essential.
Valproate	Approximately 2 per cent excreted unchanged	Dose adjustment is usually not required in renal impairment; only in severe impairment, with a GFR under 10 mL/min, may it be necessary to dose against **free (unbound) valproate levels**.
Lamotrigine	Under 10 per cent renal excretion of unchanged drug	At a GFR of 10 to 50 mL/min start low and titrate slowly in renal impairment; one source suggests 100 mg every other day where the GFR is under 10 mL/min. No lamotrigine starting dose is named at either level of function, and no maximum at the lower one.

Lithium also generates the renal problem it is dosed around. Long-term treatment may result in impaired renal function in about a quarter of patients, the phenomenon usually called **creatinine creep**, and levels above **0.8 mmol/L** are associated with a higher risk of lithium-related renal toxicity. That threshold is a prescribing constraint rather than a laboratory curiosity, because it sits inside the range some phases of illness are treated in; the published target concentrations themselves are set out elsewhere in these notes.

IN INDIA

The Indian Psychiatric Society schizophrenia guideline takes a more permissive line on the older agents than the British drug-by-drug tables do, and this matters where first-generation antipsychotics carry the public-sector caseload. Most first-generation antipsychotics are considered safe in chronic kidney disease without dose adjustment, the exception being the phenothiazines, which may increase hypotension risk. Among the second-generation agents, amisulpride and paliperidone are excreted unchanged in urine, need dose consideration, and are better avoided in end-stage renal disease. Keep the guideline's own hedges in the answer: *most* first-generation agents, and *considered* safe.

14.7 Cardiac disease: the antidepressant decision

The cardiac question is predominantly pharmacodynamic, where hepatic and renal dose adjustment is predominantly pharmacokinetic, though each of the three organs involves both axes, and the class answer is settled for one setting. In heart failure, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors are the first-line antidepressant class and the recommended agent is sertraline: it has few drug interactions, less propensity than citalopram to prolong the QTc, and demonstrated safety, though unproven efficacy, in SADHART-CHF. Safety without proven efficacy is the honest reading and should be said aloud in an answer rather than upgraded. The recommendation behind this sentence is written for heart failure and reaches no further, so whether the same class ranking holds across cardiac disease at large is a question these notes leave open rather than answer.

Tricyclic antidepressants are generally avoided in patients with cardiac disease for three separate reasons, and separating them is what distinguishes a good answer from a list:

- their effects on cardiac contractility;
- their proarrhythmic effects, arising from blockade of cardiac sodium and potassium channels;
- their potential to worsen ischaemic heart disease.

This is the single most consequential exclusion in an Indian outpatient department, where the tricyclics remain heavily used on grounds of cost. The pharmacology that produces those three effects, and the class's membrane-stabilising action, belongs to the Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes; what belongs here is that the cardiac history, not the depressive presentation, is what removes the class from consideration.

The converse error is equally examinable. After myocardial infarction, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors and mirtazapine have either a neutral or a beneficial effect on mortality, and the instruction that follows from it is written for the first of those two: treatment of depression with a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor should not be withheld post infarction. The mortality finding covers both agents; the directive not to withhold does not, so do not extend it to mirtazapine in an answer. Depression after an infarct is not a reason to defer antidepressant treatment until the heart has settled.

14.8 Cardiac disease: the antipsychotic decision

Antipsychotic choice in cardiac disease turns on two distinct liabilities: the effect on the QT interval, and the effect on the myocardium itself. On the first, cariprazine, lurasidone, brexpiprazole and lumateperone are considered safer choices in patients at risk of cardiac events, as they appear to exert minimal effects on the QT interval, and the recommendation carries an explicit exclusion: avoid olanzapine. Against them sit haloperidol, olanzapine, quetiapine, risperidone and sulpiride, which have higher affinity than other antipsychotics for cardiac potassium channels and are associated with a higher risk of ventricular arrhythmia and **sudden cardiac death**. Three of the preferred agents recur in a second setting: in paroxysmal or persistent atrial fibrillation, cariprazine, brexpiprazole or lurasidone may be appropriate choices,

and all antipsychotics appear to increase the risk of bleeding when combined with direct-acting oral anticoagulants in atrial fibrillation.

The second liability is **antipsychotic-induced cardiomyopathy**, and here the decision is not which drug but when to stop it. A left ventricular ejection fraction of **45 per cent** has been suggested as the cut-off, and the source's own table fixes the direction: while the ejection fraction stays above that figure the effective antipsychotic is continued, with 3-monthly monitoring of heart failure symptoms and NT-proBNP, and once it falls below that figure the antipsychotic is switched. Read the direction off the table rather than off the surrounding prose, because a falling ejection fraction is the signal to come off the drug and never the licence to stay on it. The word suggested is load-bearing, since the figure is extrapolated from guidelines for monitoring cardiotoxic chemotherapies and the exact level depends on the clinical scenario, so an answer that presents it as an established cut-off overstates it. The table states an action above the cut-off and an action below it and gives no rule at the cut-off itself, so the boundary case is left open here rather than answered.

> The liver principally influences how much drug is destroyed, the kidney how much leaves, and the heart what the surviving concentration does, with heart failure able to alter clearance and distribution as well; the agent that escapes one of the first two organs almost always depends on the other.

15 · Psychotropic prescribing in epilepsy, Parkinson disease and other neurological illness

The second variable here is a brain that is already diseased. Prescribing in epilepsy and in Parkinson disease inverts the ordinary logic of psychotropic choice. The agent that best fits the psychiatric syndrome may destabilise the neurological one; the drugs already on the chart for the neurological illness may be producing the psychiatric syndrome; and the option that looks safest, withholding psychiatric treatment altogether, carries a risk of its own. The marks sit on which agent, in what order, and on what is done before anything is written at all.

15.1 Epilepsy and psychiatric illness travel in both directions

People with epilepsy carry an elevated prevalence of several psychiatric disorders, and the Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines are explicit that the relationship with mental illness is **bidirectional** rather than a simple consequence of living with seizures.

13 to 37%	20%	5%	3x
DEPRESSION	ANXIETY	PSYCHOSIS	SUICIDE

Bidirectionality is what the examiner is testing, because it changes the direction of the clinical question. If the psychiatric disorder were only a reaction to the burden of a chronic illness, treating it would be a humane addition to seizure control. If the two illnesses share substrate and each raises the risk of the other, treating the psychiatric disorder becomes part of managing the epilepsy.

A second observation sharpens it. The incidence of unprovoked seizures in the general population is about 50 per 100,000 persons a year, while the incidence in the placebo arms of randomised controlled trials of antidepressants and antipsychotics is approximately 15-fold higher than that yearly figure. Nobody in a placebo arm has received an active drug, so the excess cannot be pharmacological: depression and psychosis are themselves seizure risk factors.

TRAP **Concluding that the safe course in epilepsy is to withhold the antidepressant.** Candidates reason correctly that several psychotropics lower the seizure threshold, then draw the wrong conclusion from it. The placebo-arm figure settles the argument the other way: untreated depression and psychosis carry a seizure incidence far above the population background, so leaving the psychiatric illness untreated is not the neutral option it appears to be. The decision is which agent, not whether.

15.2 Treating depression in epilepsy

The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines sort antidepressants for people with epilepsy into low-risk good choices and a higher-risk group that should be avoided because its members are **proconvulsive** at therapeutic doses. The good choices are SSRIs, mirtazapine and duloxetine; the group to avoid is amoxapine, bupropion, maprotiline and TCAs. Read the qualifier on the second group, because it carries the whole instruction: these agents provoke seizures at ordinary treatment doses, not only in overdose, which is why they are avoided outright rather than merely capped.

MNEMONIC

In: SSRIs, Mirtazapine, Duloxetine. Out: Amoxapine, Bupropion, Maprotiline, Tricyclics

Three in, four out, and the four out share a single reason. Nothing else needs to be memorised about the antidepressant list for epilepsy; everything else is a decision about which of the three to use.

Within the SSRIs the discriminator is interaction, not seizure risk. Those with the lowest risk of interactions with antiseizure medications are generally preferred, which gives citalopram or escitalopram, followed by sertraline, and escitalopram is preferred over citalopram in people with epilepsy because of the lower risk of seizures in overdose. Overdose risk is a legitimate selection criterion in a population whose suicide rate is a multiple of the general population's. The kinetic principle that generates the interaction ranking belongs to the Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes.

IN INDIA

Citalopram is not marketed here, so the preference order collapses without loss to escitalopram, then sertraline. For antipsychotics, the Indian Psychiatric Society schizophrenia guideline directs that where one is needed an agent of lower seizure propensity is chosen, and it groups quetiapine and olanzapine with clozapine, chlorpromazine, loxapine and zotepine as agents to avoid or use with caution. That is one tier stricter than the Maudsley position, which calls quetiapine and olanzapine moderate risk. Followed together, the two documents leave a practical Indian starting set of amisulpride or sulpiride, aripiprazole, ziprasidone, risperidone and the high-potency first-generation agents.

Bupropion is the instructive member of the avoid group, because its risk belongs as much to the preparation as to the molecule: the seizure risk is dose related and greatest with immediate-release formulations, and it is less with slow-release formulations at doses **under 300 mg/day**, which is where the seizure evidence puts the lower risk of the two preparations. That does not lift it out of the higher-risk group for a person who already has epilepsy. It explains why one drug can be rated differently in different populations, and it is the reason a formulation must be specified whenever this agent is discussed.

Where the depression is severe and the epilepsy unstable, the modality question arrives early rather than late. Electroconvulsive therapy has anticonvulsive properties, is worth considering for depression in patients with unstable epilepsy, and does not appear to cause or worsen epilepsy. That is the opposite of the intuition most candidates carry into a viva, and it is worth a sentence in any answer on this ground. The procedural technique is set out in the ECT and neurostimulation notes.

15.3 Antipsychotics in epilepsy: the tiers

The same source ranks antipsychotics on seizure propensity in four tiers. The low-risk good choices are amisulpride and sulpiride, aripiprazole, ziprasidone, high-potency first-generation antipsychotics and risperidone; olanzapine and quetiapine are moderate risk with care required; clozapine is higher risk; and the low-potency first-generation agents, loxapine, depots and zotepine should be avoided. The depots earn their place in the avoid group for a kinetic reason that generalises beyond this table: an agent that cannot be withdrawn quickly is a poor choice when the adverse effect you fear is a seizure.

One figure anchors the avoid tier. In people with epilepsy the low-potency first-generation agents are best avoided, and the incidence of seizures with chlorpromazine is **9 per cent at doses above 1 g/day**, an incidence the evidence attaches to that dose band rather than a target to prescribe into. This is not a historical curiosity in Indian practice, where high-dose chlorpromazine is still encountered on general wards, so the number is worth carrying.

15.4 Clozapine in epilepsy: three decisions

Clozapine is the most proconvulsive antipsychotic, and the same source records that it has still been used successfully in people with epilepsy who are stable on antiseizure medication. The risk is therefore managed rather than avoided, and three decisions follow, examined together.

The first is co-prescription. Clozapine should not be used with carbamazepine, because of the risk of blood dyscrasias and reduced clozapine levels, and lamotrigine is the antiseizure medication of choice alongside it. Two independent mechanisms converge on one instruction there, one haematological and one pharmacokinetic, which is why the prohibition is firmer than an ordinary interaction warning.

The second is prophylaxis. The Maudsley advises that it is prudent to use an antiseizure agent as prophylaxis against seizures and **myoclonus** when clozapine plasma levels are above **600 mcg/L**, and states in the same breath that this figure is not a clear evidence-based threshold but a level resting on repeated recommendation. Print the caveat with the figure. A reader who knows the source knows the number is a convention, and an answer that treats it as a hard biological boundary reads as second-hand.

The third is what happens after a seizure. Clozapine is withheld for one day, restarted at half the previous dose, and an antiseizure medication is given. Notice that the drug is not abandoned: the response is a brief interruption, a halved reintroduction and added cover, which is a dosing decision rather than a discontinuation. The immediate care of the patient who is fitting belongs to the Perinatal/women's mental health and emergency psychiatry notes.

PITFALL

Reaching for carbamazepine as the antiseizure cover. It is the reflex choice on a general ward and it is the single agent named against this combination, on two counts at once: a shared risk of blood dyscrasias, and a fall in the clozapine level that can be misread later as non-adherence. Lamotrigine is the named alternative, and the substitution should be made before the seizure, not after it.

15.5 The psychoses of epilepsy: which ones need an antipsychotic

Not every psychosis in a person with epilepsy is a psychotic illness, and the Indian Psychiatric Society schizophrenia guideline makes that discrimination the first step. Ictal and **post-ictal psychosis** are to be ruled out: they are self-remitting with supportive treatment, and preventing seizures would suffice without the need for prophylactic antipsychotic treatment. **Inter-ictal psychosis** and para-ictal psychosis would have a course similar to schizophrenia and often need antipsychotic treatment.

Read the qualifier on the first limb, because it is load-bearing: self-remitting with supportive treatment is not the same as self-remitting if left alone. The two standard sources do not say this identically. Where the Indian guideline holds that seizure control suffices without prophylactic antipsychotic treatment, the Maudsley adds a short-term symptomatic option, a benzodiazepine or an antipsychotic, tapered off carefully once symptoms resolve. They are not reconciled by picking one. The Indian wording is the citable position for an Indian answer; the Maudsley line is the comparator a strong answer names beside it.

TRAP **Treating every psychosis in epilepsy as schizophrenia and starting maintenance antipsychotic treatment.** The stem usually supplies the discriminator and candidates read past it: a psychosis tied to the seizures, which settles as the seizures are controlled, is ictal or post-ictal, and the guideline position is that preventing seizures suffices without prophylactic antipsychotic treatment. The error is not which drug was chosen. It is treating the episode as one that needs maintenance: short-term symptomatic treatment with a benzodiazepine or an antipsychotic may still be required and is tapered off carefully once symptoms resolve, and what the guideline position excludes is the prophylactic course that is started and then continued.

15.6 Psychosis in Parkinson disease: what precedes the prescription

In Parkinson disease the offending drug is usually already on the chart. Psychosis in Parkinson disease is often characterised by **visual hallucinations**, and the drug ranking that follows rests on limited data and is not a superlative about any single agent: anticholinergics and dopamine agonists seem to be associated with a higher risk of inducing psychosis than levodopa or catechol-O-methyltransferase inhibitors. It ranks one pair of drug groups against another, which makes the chart the first thing to read.

The Maudsley recommendations for the treatment of psychosis in Parkinson disease therefore place four moves ahead of any antipsychotic.

- Exclude organic causes, delirium in particular.
- Optimise the environment, to maximise orientation and minimise problems arising from poor caregiver-patient interactions.
- If the patient has insight and hallucinations are infrequent and not troubling, do not treat.
- Consider reducing or stopping anticholinergics and dopamine agonists.

Only after those does the ladder reach the step that considers an atypical antipsychotic. Three of the four are subtractive or observational, and the third is the one candidates omit: a treatment decision can be a decision not to treat, and the source states that as an instruction rather than as a permission.

RULE **In both illnesses the first move is subtractive.** In epilepsy the question is which psychotropic is provoking, or would provoke, the seizure. In Parkinson disease it is which dopaminergic or anticholinergic drug is producing the psychosis. Adding a psychotropic to a neurological illness is the second decision and never the first, and an answer that opens with the antipsychotic has skipped the half that carries the marks.

15.7 Which antipsychotic, when one is needed

Low-dose quetiapine is the best tolerated antipsychotic in Parkinson disease psychosis and it is probably reasonable to try it before clozapine, while risperidone and typical antipsychotics should be avoided completely. The word to notice is completely: this is not a caution about dose or duration but an exclusion of two whole groups, and the reason is mechanistic, since dopamine receptor blockade is the therapeutic action in schizophrenia and the pathogenic one here.

Clozapine for psychosis in Parkinson disease is started at 6.25 mg with a usual dose of **25 to 35 mg/day** in the Maudsley table of recommendations for treating psychosis in Parkinson disease. Name that table whenever the figures are printed, because the same book's guide to medication doses in older adults gives a different usual range for the same indication and adds a stated daily maximum the psychosis table does not carry. The two cells are not reconcilable, and quoting one without naming its table quotes the book against itself. Say the consequence plainly when you use the psychosis table: it gives a start and a usual range for this indication and states no ceiling above them, so the top of that range is where the usual dose ends and not where the drug is capped.

GOOD TO REMEMBER

Clozapine in Parkinson disease psychosis is monitored exactly as clozapine in schizophrenia is monitored, and older people are more prone to develop serious blood dyscrasia. A dose in the tens of milligrams does not buy a lighter haematological schedule. That, rather than the price or the supply of the drug, is what limits its use here, and it is the question to settle before the first prescription rather than after it.

Two drugs, and only two, are recommended for Parkinson disease psychosis: clozapine and pimavanserin, a 5HT2A receptor inverse agonist with no dopamine receptor activity. A network meta-analysis found only these two efficacious while having minimal effect on motor function. The mechanism explains the pairing, since an agent that suppresses psychosis without occupying the dopamine receptor has a low propensity for direct dopamine-blockade-related motor worsening. Read the meta-analysis at its stated strength: minimal effect on motor function, which is not the same as none. Quetiapine remains the reasonable first attempt on tolerability grounds while not belonging to that recommended pair, and holding both statements at once is what a good answer demonstrates. Whether pimavanserin can be obtained in India is not established by any source used here, so clozapine is the half of the pair to teach as realisable.

PSYCHOTIC SYNDROME	RELATION TO THE PRIMARY ILLNESS	FIRST MOVE	ANTIPSYCHOTIC TREATMENT
Ictal and post-ictal psychosis	Tied to the seizures; self-remitting with supportive treatment	Prevent the seizures	No prophylactic antipsychotic; the Maudsley allows a short-term symptomatic option
Inter-ictal and para-ictal psychosis	Course similar to schizophrenia	Select for lowest seizure propensity	Often needed
Psychosis in Parkinson disease	Often visual hallucinations; anticholinergics and dopamine agonists implicated	Exclude delirium, optimise environment, reduce or stop the implicated drugs	Only after those steps, and then quetiapine before clozapine

15.8 Depression and cognition in Parkinson disease

Depression in Parkinson disease has a ladder of its own, and its top step is counter-intuitive. A 2022 network meta-analysis reported in the Maudsley guidelines showed that dopamine agonists

and SSRIs have the highest efficacy and acceptability, so the class that treats the movement disorder and the class that treats depression share the top of the ranking rather than competing for it.

Augmentation with dopamine agonists such as pramipexole may be considered, but these drugs increase the risk of **impulse control disorders** and have rarely been associated with the development of psychosis. That is the same drug group implicated in inducing psychosis a moment ago, so the antidepressant strategy and the antipsychotic strategy pull against each other in one patient, and which way the prescription moves depends on which syndrome is currently dominant. The permissive modal is worth preserving in an answer: this is an option that may be considered, not a recommended step.

Electroconvulsive therapy sits further down the same ladder, and its risk signature here is not the one it had in epilepsy. Depression and motor symptoms generally respond well, but the risk of inducing delirium is high, particularly in patients with pre-existing cognitive impairment. One modality, two neurological illnesses, two opposite cautions: in unstable epilepsy its anticonvulsive property is the argument for it, and in Parkinson disease with cognitive impairment the delirium risk is the argument for care.

Cholinesterase inhibitors close the picture and are stated at a strength candidates routinely overstate. A Cochrane review and some large randomised trials concluded that there is evidence that they lead to improvements in global functioning, cognition, behavioural disturbance and activities of daily living in Parkinson disease, with the improvements in cognitive functioning described as modest, while motor function may deteriorate with a particular increase in tremor. Read it at its stated strength: a claim that evidence exists, hedged twice, with a trade of cognition against tremor that has to be discussed with the patient rather than resolved on their behalf.

> In epilepsy, treat the psychiatric illness anyway and choose the agent that does not provoke the seizure; in Parkinson disease, subtract the dopaminergic drug before adding an antipsychotic, and if one is still needed, quetiapine before clozapine.

16 · Psychopharmacology in pregnancy, lactation, the elderly and children

The drug does not change; the body around it does. Pregnancy, lactation, old age and childhood each alter clearance, distribution and vulnerability, and each adds a second person, or a failing organ, to a decision otherwise about one patient. The marks are not for reciting which agent is safe but for the decision under the changed pharmacology: which harm is traded against which, when the trade has to be made, what is measured afterwards, and which figures the standard sources dispute.

16.1 The decision is made before conception, not at the positive test

Organogenesis does not wait for a pregnancy test. The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines place the period of maximum risk to the fetus from lithium at 2 to 6 weeks after conception, before many women know they are pregnant, and add that the risk of atrial and ventricular septal defects may

also be increased. The Indian Psychiatric Society bipolar guideline draws the operational conclusion: most pregnancies are unplanned or unrecognised in the early weeks, so contraceptive counselling is offered to all reproductive-age women with bipolar disorder on treatment. A conversation that begins when the test turns positive has missed the window it was meant to influence.

Folate sharpens the same point. The Maudsley states there is no evidence folate protects against anticonvulsant-induced **neural tube defects** if given during pregnancy, but that it may do so if given prior to conception, the neural tube being essentially formed by 8 weeks of pregnancy; folate may nonetheless benefit early neurodevelopment and so should always be offered. The Indian bipolar guideline hedges the protective claim harder while keeping the same timing. The timing rule is firm; the protective effect is not.

RULE **Relapse is an exposure too.** The Indian schizophrenia guideline states that an effective antipsychotic on which the patient has been stable should not be discontinued or changed, because relapse poses a greater risk to the mother and baby than the potential adverse effects. Every decision here compares two harms rather than choosing between a harm and safety; an answer that lists teratogenic risks without the untreated illness on the other side of the scale has answered half the question.

16.2 Comparative teratogenic risk, and what the comparison licenses

Substitution rests on the spread between agents rather than on any single figure, so the risk of **major congenital malformations** is best held as a comparison across the drugs actually chosen between.

AGENT	MALFORMATION RISK AS THE SOURCE STATES IT	WHAT THE SOURCE DOES WITH IT
Lithium	Ebstein's anomaly in **0.05 to 0.1 per cent of live births** after first-trimester exposure, about twenty times the general population rate, as the Indian guideline states it. That Ebstein-specific multiple is the historical estimate; the modern cohort figure sits below the table	Small in absolute terms, which is why lithium may still be continued after shared decision-making
Valproate and divalproex	8 to 10 per cent, including neural tube defects	Contraindicated in pregnancy, and linked to later neurodevelopmental disorders
Carbamazepine	3 to 6 per cent	Adds a **neonatal bleeding diathesis** from vitamin K deficiency
Oxcarbazepine	Comparable to the general population rate, at approximately 3 per cent	Can be used in pregnancy, although safety data are limited
Lamotrigine	Approximately 3 per cent, similar to baseline, with no definite evidence of neurobehavioural sequelae	Preferred where the course is depression-predominant; clearance rises, so the dose often has to follow
Second-generation antipsychotics	4.5 per cent in exposed against 3.5 per cent in unexposed individuals	No significant increase after adjustment, apart from a small risperidone signal a later large study did not replicate
Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors	Small increased absolute risk of cardiac defects with paroxetine, 2 per 1000 exposed pregnancies, which is an excess and not the total incidence	Generally safe if indicated; avoid paroxetine

Two readings are examinable. First, the spread is the argument: because one agent sits several times above its nearest comparator, the regulatory response is specific to that agent rather than a class-wide caution, and a within-class alternative at baseline risk is what makes a restriction workable instead of merely punitive. Second, absolute and relative risk are different instruments pointed at one thing. The Maudsley guidance on advanced prescribing states the lithium risk as an absolute frequency: a population risk of Ebstein's anomaly of 1 in 20,000, rising with lithium exposure in pregnancy to 1 in 1000 to 2000. That is the Indian figure in another currency rather than a competing estimate, and both are the same historical Ebstein-specific estimate. Contemporary cohort evidence has moved the magnitude. Patorno and colleagues, reporting a large registry cohort in the New England Journal of Medicine in 2017, found cardiac malformations overall in 2.41 per cent of lithium-exposed pregnancies against 1.15 per cent of unexposed, an adjusted risk ratio of 1.65 that rose with dose, and did not establish a twenty-fold

Ebstein-specific excess. Quote the guideline figure as the guideline's, and know that the twenty-fold multiple is the older estimate rather than the current one.

16.3 Continuing lithium: the scan, and two monitoring cadences

Continuing lithium commits the clinician to fetal surveillance and to a level schedule, and both are specified differently by different bodies. The Indian bipolar guideline states that in all pregnancies with first-trimester lithium exposure a 20-week fetal cardiac anomaly scan is recommended. The reproductive-safety table of that same document advises fetal echocardiography over a window rather than at a single time point, and this chapter does not hold that second figure. The disagreement is internal to one guideline and should be quoted as such.

Haemodynamic change in pregnancy alters lithium handling, and the two guidelines specifying a cadence do not specify the same one. The Indian bipolar guideline gives monthly monitoring till 36 weeks, weekly from 36 to 40 weeks, and twice each week in the first 2 weeks postpartum, framed as a suggestion and not a mandate. The Maudsley reports that NICE recommends lithium levels be checked every four weeks in pregnancy and weekly after 36 weeks. Print both, attributed. The Indian schedule carries a postpartum limb the United Kingdom summary does not reproduce, and that absence is a silence in the summary rather than a statement that no postpartum monitoring is specified.

16.4 Valproate: a prohibition, and the machinery that enforces it

Valproate is the one agent here where the answer is not a trade-off: the Indian bipolar guideline records it as contraindicated in pregnancy, and the figure above is the whole of the reason. The regulatory machinery is examinable in its own right. The Maudsley compresses the United Kingdom position into one line: valproate may not be initiated in patients under 55 or continued in women of child-bearing potential unless two specialists agree and document that there is no other effective or tolerated treatment. That compression welds two different rules together and drops an exception, and the regulator separates them. Under the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency measures of January 2024, valproate must not be started in a new patient of either sex under 55 unless two specialists independently consider and document that there is no other effective or tolerated treatment, or that there are compelling reasons the reproductive risks do not apply. Continuation in a woman of child-bearing potential is governed instead by the pregnancy prevention programme, with annual specialist review and a signed risk acknowledgement, and not by the two-specialist initiation test. The Indian bipolar guideline quotes that fuller regulatory text, second escape clause included, which the one-line summary omits. Alongside the two-specialist rule sits the programme requirement: valproate should not be offered to girls or young women of child-bearing potential unless a **pregnancy prevention programme** is in place.

That programme is a United Kingdom instrument. No Indian counterpart is established by the sources used here: the Indian guideline refers only obliquely to restrictions on divalproex in reproductively active women and men, naming no programme, no contraception requirement, no

age bar and no two-specialist rule. Name the jurisdiction and say the equivalent is not documented.

The stopping decision has a defined shape. Where a woman on valproate decides to conceive, the Australian perinatal guidance reported by the Maudsley is to stop valproate over 2 to 4 weeks while adding high-dose folic acid **5 mg/day**, continued through the first trimester, and the Indian bipolar guideline corroborates that supplementation dose for the pre-conception period. That supplementation figure is a daily amount rather than a dose to build up to: no initiation step sits below it in either document, and neither states a maximum above it for preconception use.

GOOD TO REMEMBER

Where carbamazepine is carried to term, the vitamin K limb is what gets forgotten, because it is not a psychiatric act. What is established is the neonatal limb: intramuscular vitamin K for the newborn at birth, arranged with the paediatric team. Routine antenatal vitamin K for the mother purely because she is taking an enzyme-inducing anticonvulsant is not supported by adequate evidence, and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists green-top guidance on epilepsy in pregnancy makes maternal treatment a response to a demonstrated coagulation abnormality or another obstetric indication rather than a routine. The malformation risk was settled months earlier; the neonatal bleeding diathesis is still preventable at delivery.

16.5 Antipsychotics and antidepressants: the dose that should not fall

The commonest prescribing error in pregnancy is a well-intentioned dose reduction. The Indian schizophrenia guideline states that the dose should not be reduced merely because a patient is pregnant, since antipsychotic metabolism may increase during pregnancy and lead to subtherapeutic levels, and names clozapine as the exception, whose levels may instead increase by the third trimester. The direction of the kinetic change decides the direction of the dose change.

PITFALL

Halving an antipsychotic at the booking visit, reasoning that less drug means less exposure. Metabolism may already be rising for the agent in question, in which case the reduction compounds a fall that was happening anyway. The rule is not that doses go up in pregnancy. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists puts it as do not reduce automatically, and change a dose only where that drug's pharmacokinetics, the clinical response or a level justify the change. Where a dose was raised during pregnancy, the postpartum step is to bring it back down under close monitoring rather than leave it where the pregnancy put it.

Antidepressant decisions turn on two late-pregnancy risks rather than on malformation. The Indian guideline for obsessive-compulsive disorder states that selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors taken late in pregnancy may increase the risk of **persistent pulmonary hypertension of the newborn** by more than twofold, giving the absolute risks as 3 infants per 1000 exposed against 1.2 per 1000 unexposed. The Indian bipolar guideline describes that same association only as conflicting evidence in the third trimester, so even the strength of the claim is unsettled within one national guideline set. Separately, **neonatal adaptation difficulties** may occur in

about one-third of infants exposed late in pregnancy, which makes a paediatric handover the response rather than stopping the drug before delivery.

TRAP **One paroxetine risk, two incompatible figures inside the same national guideline set.** The bipolar guideline gives the small increased absolute risk of cardiac defects as 2 per 1000 and instructs that paroxetine be avoided. The guideline for obsessive-compulsive disorder, from the same series, states the septal-defect risk as a percentage an order of magnitude higher against a stated population rate, adding that the evidence is inconsistent. This chapter holds only the per-thousand figure. Quote what you hold, name the source, and say the other document disagrees.

16.6 Lactation: the pregnancy answer does not carry across

The reversal between the two phases is the teachable point. The Indian bipolar guideline states, in a single sentence, that breastfeeding is generally avoided with lithium because of the risk of neonatal toxicity and the need for infant serum drug level monitoring, and that divalproex is considered relatively safer in breastfeeding. Read it carefully: the comparison between the two agents is carried by a semicolon rather than asserted, and the agent contraindicated in pregnancy is the one treated more permissively at the breast. The next sentence supplies the conditional exception, that breastfeeding during lithium treatment may be considered in healthy, full-term infants with close monitoring, if only because discontinuation may pose greater risks. Emergency management of established lithium toxicity belongs to the Perinatal/women's mental health and emergency psychiatry notes.

Clozapine is where two Indian guidelines part company outright. The bipolar guideline states that clozapine should not be prescribed during breastfeeding, because of rare but serious adverse effects warranting blood monitoring. The schizophrenia guideline's corresponding table states only that antipsychotics are not contraindicated during breastfeeding and that clozapine may be present in breast milk, its potential risks to the infant needing to be considered and monitored. Both belong in an answer. For the remaining second-generation agents the bipolar guideline states that current evidence suggests quetiapine and olanzapine are safe during breastfeeding, with lactation data somewhat limited for the others.

Among antidepressants, the guideline for obsessive-compulsive disorder separates the SSRIs by how much of the drug reaches a breast-fed infant, placing sertraline, fluvoxamine and paroxetine at the low end and fluoxetine and citalopram above them, and it then surmises that they are relatively safe during breastfeeding, the hedge being the guideline's own. The two percentages that carry that separation are deliberately not printed here, because the sentence holding them describes them at once as concentrations in the plasma of breast-fed infants and as a share of the maternal dose, and those are two different quantities with two different denominators, since a plasma concentration cannot be a percentage of a dose. The source is internally inconsistent at the exact point a candidate would quote it. Reading the figures as relative infant dose, the share of the maternal dose reaching the infant through milk, is the most plausible repair, but it is an interpretation and not what the guideline says, and no source read here gives a drug-specific relative infant dose or an infant plasma ratio to substitute for it. Nothing is printed on either

reading. Milk supply is a separate axis from infant exposure, and it is where an Indian dataset displaces a Western default: **complete lactation failure** is a documented aripiprazole effect.

TRAP **Attaching a percentage to the wrong denominator.** An Indian perinatal-psychiatry chart review found that 60 of the 398 women attending the service were prescribed aripiprazole during pregnancy, with lactation data available for the 35 who continued the drug during the postpartum period; of those 35, 26 (74%) experienced complete lactation failure and 4 (11%) had insufficient milk production. The denominator of both percentages is the thirty-five with lactation data, not the sixty prescribed the drug. A national guideline compresses the study into a retrospective analysis of sixty women, attaching both percentages to the wrong number, so a candidate quoting the guideline sentence inherits an error the primary paper does not contain.

IN INDIA

Aripiprazole is the Western default for metabolic safety, and Indian perinatal data attach a lactation penalty to it that Western reproductive-safety tables do not show. A woman established on aripiprazole who intends to breastfeed therefore needs her postpartum plan settled antenatally, while there is still time to change the agent, rather than after the milk has failed. Where an antidepressant is needed alongside, the Indian bipolar guideline names sertraline as having the most substantial evidence of lactation safety.

MNEMONIC

Plan, Prefer, Persist, Postpartum

The perinatal spine. Plan before conception, because the highest-risk weeks precede the test. Prefer the agent whose documented risk is lowest for this illness course. Persist with an effective drug rather than reduce it because the physiology changed. Re-plan at delivery, when clearance, feeding and the level schedule all reverse together.

16.7 The elderly: assume the reserve has already gone

Age is a kinetic diagnosis before it is a clinical one. The Maudsley quantifies the decline that governs every renally cleared psychotropic.

35%	50%	two-thirds
RENAL FUNCTION LOST BY SIXTY-FIVE	LOST BY EIGHTY	FUNCTION TO ASSUME AT MOST

The third figure is the Maudsley's default assumption rather than a measurement, and it is a place to begin thinking rather than a dosing method. Renal function in an older adult is estimated before a renally cleared psychotropic is dosed, not assigned from age: the KDIGO chronic kidney disease guideline of 2024 makes estimated glomerular filtration rate or creatinine clearance the instrument, and adds that a creatinine-based estimate can overstate function where muscle mass is low, which is common in exactly this population, so cystatin C or a combined equation is used where creatinine is unreliable. The underlying pharmacokinetic principles belong to the Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes. For maintenance treatment in bipolar disorder the Indian guideline's suggested serum lithium levels are 0.6 to 0.8 mEq/L in

medically healthy individuals and **0.4 to 0.6 mEq/L in older adults or those with relevant medical issues**. The acute-phase figures in that guideline do not agree between its dosing table and its running text, and neither set is printed here; target concentrations and sampling timing are taught with therapeutic drug monitoring. The standard texts also diverge on the elderly starting dose and on how soon the first level is drawn, and no figure for either is printed.

For depression in older people the Indian guideline directs start low and go slow, with monitoring especially for hyponatraemia and falls, and states that older patients usually require half the starting and target dose used in adults. The Indian schizophrenia guideline sets a different, smaller reduction for antipsychotics, and the two must not be merged into one rule. Choice of agent is then driven by two burdens rather than by efficacy: that guideline states that first-line antipsychotics in older adults will be the ones with lower **anticholinergic burden** and lower sedative property, to prevent falls, that anticholinergic co-prescription should be avoided to the possible extent, and that monitoring for metabolic adverse effects should be more frequent. The interval is nowhere quantified, and supplying one would be worse than leaving it open.

Antipsychotics in dementia carry a licence and a warning that must be quoted together. Risperidone is specifically indicated for short-term treatment, up to 6 weeks, of persistent aggression in moderate to severe Alzheimer's disease unresponsive to non-pharmacological approaches, and is licensed up to 1 mg twice daily although the optimal dose in dementia is 500 micrograms twice daily. Against that, the United States Food and Drug Administration's 2005 advisory determined an increased risk of death in older adults with dementia-related psychosis treated with atypical antipsychotic drugs of between 1.6 and 1.7 times that seen in placebo-treated patients. That estimate is pooled across placebo-controlled trials of several atypical agents, and it is the basis of a class boxed warning which risperidone carries; a standard textbook restates the same ratio as risperidone-specific, and the advisory does not support that reading. What the licence entry does not give is a dose to start at. It states the licensed upper figure and the optimal figure for dementia and nothing beneath either, so the optimal dose is where the source lands rather than a rung arrived at by titration. Prescribe, review at the stated horizon, stop.

16.8 Children and adolescents: the monitoring is the answer

Paediatric prescribing is examined through monitoring far more than through drug choice, because the choice is narrow and the surveillance specific. For depression, the Maudsley makes fluoxetine the recommended first-line medication in children and adolescents, started at 10 mg daily and increased after one week to the minimum therapeutic dose of **20 mg daily**. The entry stops there. It gives the start and the step and names no ceiling for this population, so the therapeutic minimum is a floor and must not be read backwards as the limit. Valproate reappears with a paediatric starting dose and the same prohibition attached: the Maudsley table of starting doses in children and adolescents gives valproate a weight-based starting range in divided doses, with plasma levels used to determine the maintenance dose, repeating in the same cell that valproate is not to be offered to girls or young women of child-bearing potential unless a pregnancy prevention programme is in place. The range itself is withheld here: that table row

carries no indication, and a paediatric weight-based dose quoted without the condition it treats is the shape of a wrong answer. A footnote weight-bands it, the lower end belonging to lighter children; the weight cut-off is not stated here, and the Indian adult figure for divalproex belongs to a different population. No ceiling appears in the valproate row either. It carries a starting range and a prohibition and nothing above them, the maintenance dose being fixed by plasma level rather than by any stated milligram maximum.

Stimulant monitoring is where two Indian sources diverge. The Indian Psychiatric Society guideline on attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder directs that heart rate and blood pressure be measured at every visit during titration and once every 3 months. An Indian postgraduate text gives a looser schedule: pulse, blood pressure and heart rate at each dose increase and every 6 months, with weight and height on standardized charts at 6-month intervals as a minimum, adding that routine haematological tests are unnecessary. The guideline's intervals are the ones to work to, and the textbook's looser schedule is worth knowing as the divergence rather than quoting as the standard. That guideline also contradicts itself internally, its continued-monitoring text asking for measurement at every visit with no step-down. Whether an electrocardiogram is required before a stimulant cannot be settled from these sources either: the textbook and the guideline do not agree on whether the tracing is a baseline requirement or a reactive step once a blood-pressure problem has emerged.

Two thresholds carry named consequences and both are frequently misplaced by tier. In the guideline's adverse-effect table, initial management of tachycardia and rise in blood pressure, listed for methylphenidate and atomoxetine, is triggered by sustained tachycardia of more than 120 beats per minute, or systolic or diastolic blood pressure more than the 95th percentile measured on 2 occasions, and the action is to reduce the dose and refer to a cardiologist. Separately, and only as a second-tier step once initial management has failed, persisting **growth suppression**, or growth parameters below the critical thresholds even after stopping the drug, roughly below the third percentile and growth velocity falling 2 centile lines over 1 year, prompts referral to a paediatric endocrinologist. That criterion is conjunctive: both limbs, not either alone. Initial management of growth retardation, in the order the guideline prints it, is a ladder.

- Dosage reduction.
- Weekend and longer drug holidays, to allow catch-up growth.
- Changing the class of medication.
- Stopping the drug.

The growth signal justifying all of this is real but modest. In the MTA follow-up, the group that did not receive medication was about 1 cm taller and 1 kg heavier at the 24-month follow-up than the group treated with stimulant medication for the entire two-year period. A difference of that size argues for charting growth at fixed intervals, not for withholding an effective treatment.

In every one of these populations the pharmacology of the drug is unchanged; what has changed is the body it enters, so the dose, the level and the monitoring interval must all move with it.

17 · QTc prolongation and cardiometabolic monitoring across psychotropics

Two monitoring problems share one heading for a reason. Cardiac conduction and cardiometabolic risk are the harms psychotropics produce slowly, silently and measurably, and that combination makes a schedule rather than a symptom the instrument of safety. Both are examined as decisions rather than as facts: which number obliges which action, which agent carries which liability, who gets a tracing and how often, and where an Indian guideline parts company with a British one. The receptor pharmacology behind each class's adverse-effect signature belongs to the Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes. What follows is the monitoring that pharmacology obliges, and the decisions its results force.

17.1 The thresholds, and how firmly each is held

The **QTc** is the interval corrected for heart rate, and its published cut-offs are not held with equal confidence. The Maudsley 15th edition gives the normal limits as 440 ms for men and 470 ms for women and describes arrhythmia risk beyond those limits as exponentially related to the extent of prolongation, while labelling that limb very limited evidence with well-known exceptions. It holds the next step more firmly: values over **500 ms** carry a clearly increased risk of arrhythmia. The same passage carries a fourth limb, attaching a better-than-even chance of inducing torsades to a still longer interval, and that limb is withheld here with its figure: no QTc value has a validated patient-level probability of torsades attached to it, because the risk that a given tracing carries also depends on the drug, the correction formula used, the heart rate, the electrolytes and the structural state of the heart. Carry the strength of each statement along with its figure, because an answer that prints all three at one confidence has misreported the source it is quoting.

440 ms	470 ms	500 ms
NORMAL LIMIT, MEN	NORMAL LIMIT, WOMEN	CLEARLY RAISED RISK

A second Maudsley text puts coordinates on the same curve, and this is the point at which a printed figure has to be refused rather than quoted. The Maudsley Guidelines on Advanced Prescribing in Psychosis state that the relationship between QTc and torsade risk is exponential and attach an absolute probability to each of two named intervals. Those two percentages are withheld here. Cardiology guidance on the prevention of torsades de pointes in hospital settings describes the risk as rising continuously with the interval, substantially so above the clearly-raised-risk threshold already named, and declines to convert any single QTc value into a probability for an individual patient. So the two accounts differ in kind rather than in direction: one calls the exponential relation very limited evidence, one quantifies it, and the cardiology position is that the quantification does not survive at the level of the patient in front of you. Teach the direction and the action threshold, attribute whichever account you use to the body that states it, and do not read a percentage off a tracing.

17.2 Reading the number as an instruction

RULE **A QTc value is read as an instruction, not as a diagnosis.** Each band of the Maudsley management grid names two things at once, what happens to the prescription and how urgently cardiology is involved, and the grid carries a further row that fires on the shape of the tracing whatever the measured interval turns out to be.

Table 1.38 of the Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines sets out that ladder for patients receiving antipsychotic drugs. Read the direction of travel across it rather than the cells in isolation: the intermediate band leaves the clinician discretion over dose reduction or switching, and the top band withdraws that discretion and attaches an immediate referral to it.

QTC ON THE TRACING	WHAT HAPPENS TO THE PRESCRIPTION	CARDIOLOGY REFERRAL
Below 440 ms in men or 470 ms in women	None, unless T-wave morphology is abnormal	Consider if in doubt
Above those limits but below 500 ms	Consider reducing the dose or switching to a drug of lower effect, and repeat the electrocardiogram	Consider
Above 500 ms	Repeat the electrocardiogram, stop the suspected causative drug and switch to a drug of lower effect	Immediately
Abnormal T-wave morphology, whatever the interval	Review treatment, and consider reducing the dose or switching to a drug of lower effect	Immediately

That last row is the one candidates leave out, and it is the row that makes the grid a clinical instrument rather than an arithmetic one. **Abnormal T-wave morphology**, independent of the QTc value, triggers treatment review, consideration of dose reduction or switching, and immediate cardiologist referral. A comfortable interval on a tracing with an abnormal T wave does not discharge the clinician.

17.3 Three variables, not one: the drug, the co-prescription and the patient

The Maudsley stratification of antipsychotics by effect on the QTc runs to four bands, and the usable information sits at the two ends. The high-effect band carries pimozide and sertindole, while the no-effect band holds brexpiprazole, cariprazine, lurasidone and lumateperone. The low-effect band takes aripiprazole, asenapine, clozapine, olanzapine, paliperidone, risperidone, sulpiride and the older thioxanthenes and phenothiazines listed with them, and amisulpride, chlorpromazine, haloperidol, quetiapine and ziprasidone sit in the moderate band. The clinically useful reading is comparative rather than absolute: the choice is rarely between an agent that prolongs and one that does not, but between bands.

The co-prescription is the second variable, and it is usually written by somebody else. Table 1.37 of the same chapter groups the non-psychotropics associated with QT prolongation into four

families.

- Antibiotics: erythromycin, clarithromycin, co-trimoxazole and pentamidine, with a note that some quinolones affect the QTc. One further antibiotic printed on that row is withheld here, because the maintained database the same table points to does not carry it in any torsades-risk category and no causal source for it could be supplied.
- Antimalarials: chloroquine, mefloquine and quinine.
- Antiarrhythmics: quinidine, disopyramide, procainamide, sotalol, amiodarone and bretylium.
- Others: amantadine, cyclosporin, diphenhydramine, hydroxyzine, methadone, nicardipine and tamoxifen.

The table directs the reader to Crediblemeds.org for current information and states that it is not a complete list. That caveat teaches better than the list does: absence from a printed table is not evidence that an agent is safe, and the reference to a maintained database is the guideline conceding that a book cannot keep this current. The converse holds too, and it is why one entry was withheld above: presence on a printed row is not itself a risk category, and where the maintained database and the book disagree it is the database that the book tells you to use.

The patient is the third variable. The Maudsley Table 1.36 of physiological risk factors sorts them into cardiac factors, being **long QT syndrome**, bradycardia, ischaemic heart disease, myocarditis, myocardial infarction and left ventricular hypertrophy; metabolic factors, being **hypokalaemia**, hypomagnesaemia and hypocalcaemia; and others, being extreme physical exertion, stress or shock, anorexia nervosa, extremes of age and female gender. Of the three groups only the metabolic one is correctable by a laboratory result and a bag of fluid, which is why it is checked first.

GOOD TO REMEMBER

These additional risk factors seem almost always to be present in cases of antipsychotic-induced **torsade de pointes**. Treat that sentence as an instruction about where to look: a prolonged interval in a patient on an antipsychotic is a prompt to hunt for the second and third variables rather than a verdict on the first. Send the electrolytes, read the rest of the drug chart, and find out what the heart was like before the prescription was written.

17.4 Antidepressants, and one disagreement worth knowing

The antidepressant account is narrower than the antipsychotic one and easier to overstate. Among antidepressants, the Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines hold that QT changes are not usually seen with most SSRIs at normal clinical doses, that the class-level association is largely driven by citalopram and escitalopram and is dose-related but modest, that sertraline prolongs QT by 5 to 10 ms at 400 mg a day, a figure the same evidence sets against those normal clinical doses rather than a dose it recommends. A fourth clause, exonerating three named newer antidepressants of any effect on cardiac conduction, is withheld: the passage quoted from that chapter does not carry it, and an absolute of that width is not a thing to print on an unverified line. Treat the position on those agents as unstated here rather than as reassurance.

The Indian Psychiatric Society depression guideline declines the second of those clauses. It states that escitalopram does not pose a clinically significant risk of QTc prolongation, which is a softer position than attributing the class effect to citalopram and escitalopram jointly. Both belong in an answer: the Indian guideline exculpates escitalopram and the United Kingdom source does not, neither position is derivable from the other, and a candidate who quotes only one is wrong against the examiner who holds the other.

Citalopram, one of the antidepressants named in that class effect, is the standard pharmacovigilance illustration in this territory: the FDA restricts it to a maximum of **20 mg daily** for defined subgroups, including patients taking a CYP2C19 inhibitor and those older than 60 years, because it causes dose-dependent QT interval prolongation. That list is not closed, and reading it as closed is the error to avoid: the same 20 mg ceiling is set by the regulator's 2012 safety communication for patients with hepatic impairment and for CYP2C19 poor metabolisers. Note what kind of ceiling that is. It is not a toxicity limit and not a licensing quirk; it is a regulator converting a conduction signal, in subgroups defined by enzyme inhibition, enzyme genotype, liver function and age, into a hard dose restriction. Note also that the citalopram restriction travels in one direction only. It names a maximum for each subgroup and no starting dose at all, so it constrains where a regimen may end up and says nothing at all about where it starts.

17.5 Who gets a tracing, and when

Two bodies answer this differently and both answers are examinable. The Maudsley position is to measure QTc in all patients prescribed antipsychotics on admission and, if there is a previous abnormality or a known additional risk factor, at the annual physical health check. Its monitoring table places the electrocardiogram at baseline, at target dose, on admission to hospital, if cardiac symptoms occur, and when medication is changed; the tracing is mandatory for haloperidol, pimozide and sertindole, and for ziprasidone in some situations, and ideally all patients should be offered an electrocardiogram at least yearly.

The Indian Psychiatric Society schizophrenia guideline triggers on different criteria. For the chronic phase or multiepisode relapsing-remitting illness it states that an electrocardiogram would be needed for patients over 40 years, on injectable antipsychotics, or on antipsychotics at high risk of increasing QTc, along with nutritional status. Both documents use a drug trigger, so the contrast is narrower than it first looks. What is genuinely Indian is the age threshold, which the Maudsley triggers do not use, and the naming of the injectable route as a trigger in its own right.

Opioid substitution carries a third grid, and it is worth knowing because the same figures do different work in it. The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines, which carry this table across successive editions with identical thresholds, grade methadone electrocardiogram monitoring by sex: borderline prolonged QTc is 470 ms or more in females and 440 ms or more in males, prolonged QTc is 500 ms or more, and very prolonged QTc is 550 ms or more, each band carrying its own action limb. The two numbers that were the upper edge of normal in the antipsychotic grid are the entry to the borderline band here, which is a reminder that a threshold belongs to the table it was printed in.

17.6 The cardiometabolic panel and the intervals that carry it

Metabolic monitoring is where the Western and Indian answers diverge furthest. The parameters are much the same in every grid; what differs is how early the first repeat falls, how the first year is treated, and which agents earn a column of their own. The accompanying figure sets the recurring intervals side by side.

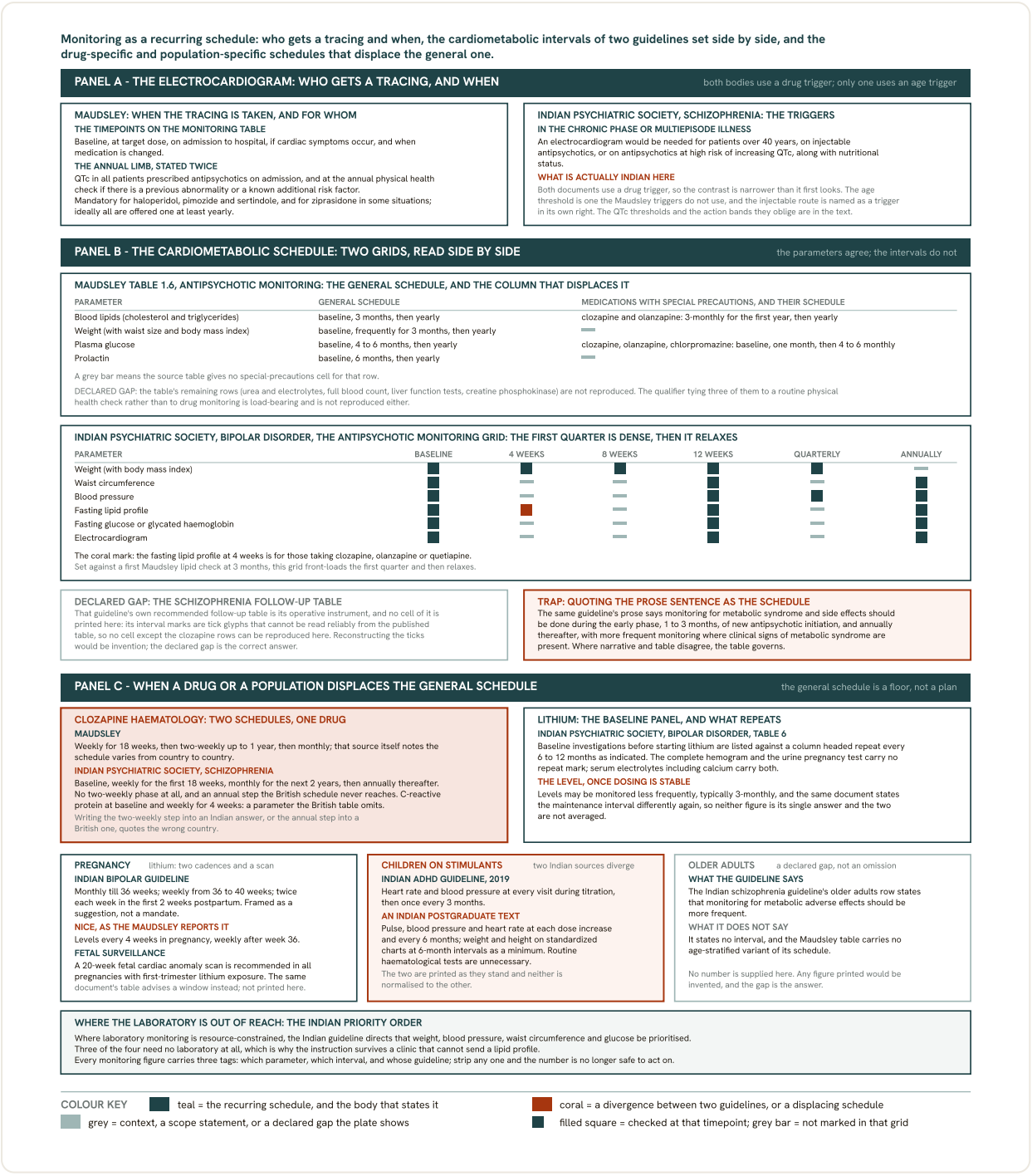


Fig 37.8 The recurring monitoring schedule: who gets a tracing and when, the cardiometabolic intervals of two guidelines set side by side, and the drug-specific and population-specific schedules that displace the general one. The Maudsley table is built around one early check and an annual rhythm, and carries a second column for clozapine, olanzapine and chlorpromazine that displaces the general one; the Indian bipolar grid front-loads the first quarter, with visits at 4, 8 and 12 weeks, and then relaxes. Clozapine haematology and lithium each carry a whole schedule of their own in place of the general one, and the two clozapine schedules part company at the second step: the British goes weekly, two-weekly, monthly, while the Indian goes weekly, then straight to monthly, and eventually to annual. Pregnancy, childhood and old age each set their own interval, and the interval for older adults is a declared gap, because the guideline says monitoring should be more frequent and states no number. The Indian schizophrenia guideline's own follow-up table is named as the operative instrument and is not reproduced, because its interval marks cannot be read reliably from the published table. Plasma target ranges are not on this plate; they are taught with therapeutic drug monitoring. (Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines in Psychiatry, 15th ed.; Indian Psychiatric Society Clinical Practice Guidelines 2025 for schizophrenia and bipolar disorder; for the stimulant row, the Indian Psychiatric Society attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder guideline of 2019, from its child and adolescent set, not the 2025 set; an Indian postgraduate child and adolescent psychiatry text; NICE as reported by the Maudsley.)

The Maudsley Table 1.6 gives blood lipids at baseline, at 3 months, then yearly; weight, including waist size and body mass index where possible, at baseline, frequently for the first 3 months, then yearly; plasma glucose at baseline, at 4 to 6 months, then yearly; and prolactin at baseline, at 6 months, then yearly. That is a schedule built around a single early check and an annual rhythm thereafter.

PITFALL

Applying the general interval to a patient who is on an agent with a column of its own. In the same Maudsley table the medications with special precautions on the blood lipids row are clozapine and olanzapine, tested 3-monthly for the first year, then yearly; on the plasma glucose row they are clozapine, olanzapine and chlorpromazine, tested at baseline, at one month, then 4 to 6 monthly. The general and the special-precautions schedules sit in adjacent columns of the same row, and reading across the wrong one is the commonest way a monitoring plan is written short for exactly the patients who needed it longest.

The Indian Psychiatric Society bipolar guideline's antipsychotic monitoring grid is denser early. Its columns are baseline, 4 weeks, 8 weeks, 12 weeks, quarterly and annually. Weight with body mass index is marked at baseline and at each of the three early visits and quarterly, but not annually; waist circumference at baseline, at 12 weeks and annually; blood pressure at baseline, at 12 weeks, quarterly and annually; the fasting lipid profile at baseline, at 12 weeks and annually, with an added check at 4 weeks for those taking clozapine, olanzapine or quetiapine; and fasting glucose or glycated haemoglobin and the electrocardiogram at baseline, at 12 weeks and annually. Set against a first Maudsley lipid check at three months, the Indian grid front-loads the first quarter and then relaxes.

TRAP **Quoting a guideline's prose sentence as though it were the guideline's schedule.** The Indian Psychiatric Society schizophrenia guideline states in its text that investigative monitoring for metabolic syndrome and side effects should be done during the early phase, 1 to 3 months of new antipsychotic initiation, and annually thereafter, with more frequent monitoring where clinical signs of metabolic syndrome are present. That sentence is not the document's operative instrument: the same guideline carries a recommended follow-up table, and where the narrative and the table do not agree the table governs. Name the prose statement, attribute it, and do not present its interval as the Indian metabolic monitoring schedule.

17.7 Clozapine haematology: two schedules, one drug

TRAP **Assuming one clozapine blood-count schedule worldwide.** The Maudsley schedule is weekly for 18 weeks, then two-weekly up to 1 year, then monthly, and that source itself notes the schedule varies from country to country. The Indian Psychiatric Society schizophrenia guideline runs baseline, weekly for the first 18 weeks, monthly for the next 2 years, then annually thereafter, with no two-weekly phase at all and an eventual annual step the British schedule never reaches. Writing the two-weekly step into an Indian answer, or the annual step into a British one, quotes the wrong country.

The action thresholds travel with whichever schedule is being used. The suspect medication is stopped if neutrophils fall below **1.5×10^9/L** in a patient taking clozapine, unless **benign ethnic**

neutropenia is diagnosed, and specialist medical referral is made if neutrophils fall below 0.5 x 10^9/L on clozapine. The exception is written into the rule rather than bolted onto it, so a low count is a question about the patient's baseline before it is an instruction to stop.

The Indian guideline adds a parameter the British table does not: C-reactive protein for clozapine at baseline and weekly for 4 weeks. Its own footnote is candid about the rest of the schedule, recording that an emerging expert statement suggests less stringent monthly blood monitoring after the first year of clozapine therapy because the incidence of clozapine-induced agranulocytosis is very low, but that this has yet to be reflected in any guidelines worldwide for want of robust evidence. The monthly figure therefore stands, and an answer that softens it on the strength of the footnote has read the footnote backwards.

17.8 Lithium's baseline panel, and the Indian adaptation

Lithium is monitored on two tracks and only one of them is a plasma concentration. The Indian Psychiatric Society bipolar guideline's Table 6 lists the baseline investigations to be done before starting lithium against a column headed repeat every 6 to 12 months as indicated: the complete hemogram and the urine pregnancy test carry no repeat mark, while serum electrolytes including calcium carry both. The same document also states that once lithium dosing has been stabilised the blood levels may be monitored less frequently, typically 3-monthly, and its narrative text states the lithium maintenance interval differently again, so neither figure is the guideline's single answer and the two must not be averaged into one.

What the Indian documents add beyond intervals is a definition and a priority order. The criteria for **metabolic syndrome** are population-specific, and the guideline gives its reason in the open: population-specific criteria should be followed when assessing metabolic syndrome, given the higher body fat content and risk profile in Indians.

IN INDIA

Read the list below as components, not as a checklist that must be completed. Under the harmonised definition of the metabolic syndrome, the diagnosis is made when any three of the five components are present, so a patient who meets three of them has the syndrome and a patient who meets two does not. Applied to an Indian patient, those five components are a **waist circumference** at or above **90 cm** in males and 80 cm in females, triglycerides at or above 150 mg/dL, HDL below 40 mg/dL in males and below 50 mg/dL in females, systolic blood pressure at or above 130 mmHg and/or diastolic at or above 85 mmHg, and fasting blood sugar at or above 100 mg/dL. Assess the patient in front of you against these, not against a threshold set imported from another population, because the same measurement can clear one definition and meet the other.

MNEMONIC

Weight, Pressure, Waist, Glucose

Where laboratory monitoring is resource-constrained, the Indian Psychiatric Society schizophrenia guideline directs that weight, blood pressure, waist circumference and glucose be prioritised. Three of the four need no laboratory at all, which is why the instruction survives a clinic that cannot send a lipid profile, and it answers a question the Western tables never ask: what to keep when the full panel is out of reach.

Every monitoring figure carries three tags: which parameter, which interval, and whose guideline; strip any one of them and the number is no longer safe to act on.

Neurostimulation and device-based treatments

18 · Electroconvulsive therapy: indications, mechanism, technique and adverse effects

Every other treatment in this chapter is a molecule. **Electroconvulsive therapy** is the one intervention chosen against the drugs rather than among them, and the long modality question asks the same five things each time: what it is, how it is thought to work, which disorders it earns a place in, how good the evidence is in each of them, and what it costs the patient. The procedural act itself, the technique and its parameters, is set out in the ECT and neurostimulation notes. What follows is the modality and its utility across disorders, which is where the marks are actually lost, usually by quoting one guideline body as though it spoke for all of them.

18.1 What is established about mechanism, and what is not

An Indian review of how the treatment works reaches a conclusion that is itself the examinable point: **no single mechanism of action** is established, because the cause and effect relationship between the observed biological findings and the therapeutic effect has not been settled, and a single explanatory account cannot prudently be assumed. Candidates lose marks by picking one of the competing hypotheses and defending it as the answer. The stronger answer sets them out as convergent lines of evidence and says plainly that none has been shown to carry the therapeutic effect on its own.

RULE **Seizure induction appears necessary but not sufficient for the antidepressant effect.** A generalised seizure can be induced and still fail to produce an antidepressant response, which constrains every purely seizure-based account of how the treatment works. It also explains why the modality is not interchangeable with any other way of producing a seizure, and why an answer that stops at "it induces a seizure" has answered nothing.

The integrative account now in circulation is explicitly **a proposed model** and not an established mechanism: an acute disruption of brain function, followed by a transient enhancement of neuroplasticity, with the combination of disruption and neuroplastic change rewiring the circuits implicated in depression. Write it as a model. Presenting it as settled mechanism is a correctness error, and it is the easiest one to make in this section because the model is coherent, widely

repeated and pleasant to remember. The useful discipline is to attach the evidential status to the sentence rather than to a footnote: unsettled mechanism, one plausible integrative model, one constraint that any model has to satisfy.

18.2 The indication set as the Indian guideline draws it

The Indian Psychiatric Society guideline on the use of electroconvulsive therapy sets the treatment as first-line where a rapid or definitive response is needed to avert harm to self or others, and names its exemplar situations: acute suicidal risk, agitation, **catatonia**, and deteriorating physical status secondary to a psychiatric condition. Two features of that sentence are examined. The trigger is the need for speed or certainty of response, not a diagnosis; and the guideline's own wording marks the list as open rather than closed, so it is an illustration of the trigger and not a set of four qualifying conditions.

MNEMONIC

Suicide risk, Agitation, Catatonia, Deterioration

The four situations the Indian guideline names when it places the treatment first-line. Recite the list, then immediately say that the guideline marks it non-exhaustive, because a candidate who presents four exemplars as four criteria has misread the recommendation in the direction that matters clinically.

Beyond that trigger, the same guideline enumerates indications disorder by disorder in a table, and the depression row is the spine of the Indian indication list. That row is reproduced in the comparison below rather than here. What the reader should take from the guideline as a document is its method: it was produced by consensus, with no formal systematic literature search. That is not a criticism, and it does not weaken the Indian practice position, which is what the document exists to state. It does decide where each half of an answer comes from. Effect sizes and response rates come from trials and meta-analyses; the position on when the treatment is offered in Indian practice comes from the guideline. Mixing the two, and citing the guideline for an effect size, is a sourcing error a good examiner will notice.

18.3 What each body recommends, side by side

The bodies do not say the same thing, and the divergence is not error: they are answering different questions about different populations, with different methods behind them. Reading the recommendations as one recommendation is the commonest way this material goes wrong.

ISSUING BODY AND RECOMMENDATION	POPULATION IT SPEAKS TO	POSITION, AND THE STRENGTH ATTACHED TO IT
Indian Psychiatric Society guideline on the use of electroconvulsive therapy	Any psychiatric presentation needing a rapid or definitive response to avert harm	First-line, with acute suicidal risk, agitation, catatonia and deteriorating physical status given as exemplars and the list left explicitly open
The same guideline, indication table	Major depressive disorder	Poor oral intake; high suicidal risk; high distress requiring rapid symptom remission; psychotic features; melancholic features; peripartum depression; treatment resistance; severe mixed affective features
NICE TA59 recommendation 1.1	Catatonia, and a prolonged or severe manic episode	Recommended only to achieve rapid and short-term improvement of severe symptoms, and only after an adequate trial of other treatment options has proven ineffective and/or where the condition is considered potentially life-threatening
NICE, on schizophrenia	Schizophrenia, general use	The state of the evidence does not allow general use to be recommended, which is a statement about evidence and not a safety prohibition
NICE NG222 recommendation 1.13.9	People whose depression has responded to a course	Start or continue antidepressant medication or a psychological intervention to prevent relapse; consider lithium augmentation of antidepressant medication
VA/DoD major depressive disorder guideline	Severe major depressive disorder with catatonia, psychotic depression, or need for a rapid, definitive response on medical or psychiatric grounds	Recommendation 20, a strong recommendation to offer the treatment with or without psychotherapy, on evidence the guideline itself rates very low

The last row repays a second look, because it is the cleanest available illustration of a distinction candidates blur. A strong recommendation resting on evidence the issuing body grades very low is not an inconsistency: strength encodes how confident the panel is that the benefits outweigh the harms for that population, and it can be driven by the severity of the untreated condition rather than by trial quality. The three limbs of the older NICE appraisal work the other way, and they are conjunctive rather than alternative: the aim has to be rapid and short-term improvement of severe symptoms, other options have to have failed or the condition has to be potentially life-threatening, and the patient has to have catatonia or a prolonged or severe manic episode. Rapid improvement on its own is not the threshold there.

TRAP **Citing the old technology appraisal as the current position in depression.** Its depression recommendations were superseded by the later depression guideline; only the catatonia, mania and schizophrenia limbs survive. A candidate who quotes the appraisal for depression is quoting a withdrawn recommendation, and the marks go to whoever names the right document for the right disorder rather than to whoever remembers the most recommendation numbers.

18.4 How strong the evidence is, disorder by disorder

Efficacy is not uniform across the indication list, and the evidence supporting each indication is of very different quality. The pooled analysis that remains the standard efficacy citation compared real against **simulated treatment** in depressive disorders, and separately against pharmacotherapy, in a total of eighteen head-to-head drug comparisons.

-0.91	-0.80	50%	0.55
VS SIMULATED, SES	VS DRUGS, SES	CLOZAPINE AUGMENTATION	MEMORY LOSS, SMD

The comparison against simulated treatment rests on six trials and 256 patients, with a confidence interval running from -1.27 to -0.54; the comparison against drug treatment rests on eighteen trials and 1144 participants, interval -1.29 to -0.29. Both favour the treatment significantly. Neither is a sequencing instruction. A head-to-head superiority result over pharmacotherapy is an argument against reflexively exhausting drug trials first, not an argument for reserving the modality until they are exhausted, and reading it the second way inverts what the numbers show.

In catatonia the reported figures are the highest in psychiatry and the weakest in design. Retrospective observational studies report response rates ranging from **80 percent to 100 percent**, from case series rather than randomised trials. The same review supplies the counterweight, and it has to travel with the figure: although pharmacotherapy had failed in 85 percent of the patients, the treatment improved 59 percent of the cases. Quoting the higher range alone overstates the indication.

In schizophrenia the evidence separates into two questions that are routinely conflated. For **clozapine-resistant schizophrenia**, a single-blind randomised trial found half of those given augmentation met the response criterion while none of those continuing clozapine alone did, with 47 percent responding in the crossover phase and an intention-to-treat sample numbering 39; the same report states that further research is needed on whether the improvement persists and whether maintenance treatment is required. For **treatment-resistant schizophrenia** in general, a systematic review found moderate-quality evidence of a positive effect on medium-term clinical response relative to standard care, with no clear and convincing advantage or disadvantage for other outcomes, and 14 of its 15 included studies at high risk of bias. Treating the augmentation trial as evidence for the general resistant population, or the review as evidence for the clozapine-resistant subgroup, is a correctness error in either direction.

18.5 Where it enters against the alternatives, and what has to follow it

The modality question is really a sequencing question. Each of the device-based treatments enters the pathway at a different point and for a different reason, and the accompanying figure sets all of them against the disorders they are used in and the strength of evidence behind each. What distinguishes this one is that it is the only modality in that frame with a randomised superiority result against drug treatment in depression, and the only one whose indication list is written around urgency rather than around failure.

Neurostimulation utility across disorders: all six device-based modalities in one frame, placed by what must have failed before each is offered, by the indications it has earned, and by the strength of the statement that grants each one.

SIX MODALITIES, THREE QUESTIONS: WHERE IT ENTERS, WHAT IT HAS EARNED, WHERE IT FAILS — read the last column as hard as the one before it

MODALITY and its physical logic	WHERE IT ENTERS, AND WHOSE STATEMENT SETS IT prior failure is counted in a different unit on every row	THE INDICATIONS IT HAS EARNED, AND ITS GRADE the grades are not interchangeable across disorders	NEGATIVE, NULL OR UNGRADED the rungs candidates leave out
ECT convulsive	IPS ECT guideline 2023: FIRST-LINE where a rapid or definitive response is needed to avert harm. Exemplars: acute suicidal risk, agitation, catatonia, deteriorating physical status; the list is explicitly non-exhaustive. Consensus, with no formal systematic literature search. NICE TA59 rec 1.1 binds THREE LIMBS TOGETHER: rapid and short-term improvement of severe symptoms; other options failed and/or the condition potentially life-threatening; and catatonia, or a prolonged or severe manic episode.	DEPRESSION Real against simulated ECT: SES -0.91, from 6 trials and 256 patients. Against pharmacotherapy: SES -0.80, from 18 trials and 1144 participants. VA/DoD rec 20 is strong FOR, on evidence the panel itself rated very low, in severe MDD with catatonia, psychotic depression, or a need for a rapid, definitive response. SCHIZOPHRENIA Clozapine-resistant: response 50% with ECT augmentation against 0% alone, 47% on crossover, ITT n=39. CATATONIA 80% to 100%, retrospective observational only.	Treatment-resistant schizophrenia generally: only moderate-quality evidence of medium-term response, with 14 of 15 studies at high risk of bias. The same catatonia review: pharmacotherapy had failed in 85% and ECT improved 59% of cases. NICE does not recommend general use in schizophrenia, on the state of the evidence, not on safety. TA59's depression limb was replaced by NG222.
rTMS sub-convulsive	IPS rTMS guideline 2023: an ADJUNCT to conventional treatment across the conditions reviewed, and in TRD augmentation beats stand-alone rTMS. VA/DoD rec 17: after partial or no response to two or more adequate pharmacologic trials. Weak, very low. RANZCP 2020 item 1.6: a reasonable number of adequate trials of BOTH drug AND psychological treatment, with no number fixed. Graded CBR, consensus and not evidence.	DEPRESSION graded STRONG: effect sizes 0.302 to 0.83, response odds ratios 3.26 to 3.64, remission 2.45 to 4.63. BIPOLAR DEPRESSION moderate: effect size 0.302, OR 2.72. SCHIZOPHRENIA negative symptoms SMD 0.49 to 0.64: high-frequency left DLPFC and more than 10 sessions beat sham. Resistant auditory hallucinations SMD 0.24 to 0.51, over 4 to 40 sessions given up to 8 weeks. OCD moderately positive: Y-BOCS SMDs 0.501 to 0.79, over 10 to 30 sessions across 1 to 12 weeks. GAD effect sizes are 1.45 to 1.87, with comorbid depression at SMD 1.65.	Panic disorder: not found effective. Clozapine-refractory schizophrenia: three RCTs of augmentation, no significant effect on positive or negative symptoms or on cognition. Tobacco use disorder is positive for craving and consumption; other substance use is not consistent. NOT recommended in acute suicidality. NICE: may be used with NORMAL arrangements for clinical governance and audit. MOST effect sizes above are for rTMS added to something else; verify each estimate.
tDCS subthreshold	No prior-failure count is set by any source read here. NICE puts tDCS for depression under SPECIAL arrangements for clinical governance, consent, and audit or research, one step below the position it gives rTMS. No Indian guideline sets it a place in the ladder at all.	DEPRESSION is the only disorder with a stated position, and both named trials are null on their own question. ELECT-TDCS: non-inferiority to escitalopram NOT shown over 10 weeks, with more adverse events; a single-centre trial. DepressionDC: the main trial showed no beneficial anti-depressant effect of active tDCS over sham.	No stated position in any other disorder. The mechanism is subthreshold polarisation, so the anode-excites heuristic cannot be written as a law: mechanisms vary with the current and its application.
IMPLANTED DEVICES DBS and VNS	DBS in OCD, US FDA HDE H050003, 10 February 2009: adults with chronic severe treatment-resistant OCD who failed AT LEAST THREE SSRIs, adjunct to medication. Humanitarian pathway on a probable-benefit standard, NOT effectiveness. VNS in depression, US FDA PMA P970003/S050, 15 July 2005: FOUR OR MORE adequate antidepressant treatments, at 18 or older, in a major depressive episode, chronic or recurrent. Eight guidelines: DBS only after all options have failed.	OCD carries the DBS regulatory position and DEPRESSION the VNS one, and neither rests on a positive controlled trial. DBS in depression: BROADEN found no significant difference between active and sham at six months and was halted on an interim futility analysis. VNS: acute D-02 responders 15.3% (17 of 111) active against 10.0% (11 of 110) sham, p=0.238; the 12-month uncontrolled phase gave response 29.8% and remission 17.1%.	VA/DoD recommends AGAINST DBS for depression outside research at strong strength, and suggests against VNS outside research at weak strength. NICE puts implanted VNS under special arrangements. One guideline in that same review does not recommend DBS beyond a research setting. RECOVER, the largest neuromodulation trial in psychiatry to date, did not meet its primary endpoint.
MST convulsive	Placed on no prior-failure ladder by any source read here. The comparator in both randomised trials is ECT, because the claim under test is not that seizures help but that this way of producing them costs the patient less.	CREST-MST, a confirmatory randomised non-inferiority trial, 239 randomised: remission 22.5% with MST against 27.8% with ultrabrief ECT, a 5.3% difference favouring ECT, with non-inferiority established; worsening of autobiographical memory 2.7% against 17.3%. BIPOLAR DEPRESSION CORRECT-BD pilot, n=55 randomised: remission 5/25 (20%) against 6/20 (30%), memory worsening 2/28 (7.1%) against 6/27 (22.2%). Not powered for efficacy.	Non-inferiority is not equality: the remission point estimate favoured ECT in both studies. The claim that MST seizures are less robust than ECT seizures rests on animal evidence only. No source read here states the disorder or population of the confirmatory trial, so this frame names none; only the pilot's own report names bipolar depression.
THETA-BURST AND ACCELERATED patterned rTMS	Placed on no prior-failure ladder by any source read here. VA/DoD rec 18 declines to recommend either for or against theta-burst stimulation in major depressive disorder, on insufficient evidence of very low certainty.	DEPRESSION THREE-D: iTBS non-inferior to 10 Hz rTMS in treatment-resistant depression, adjusted difference 0.103, lower 95% CI -1.16, against a pre-specified margin of 2.25. Stanford Neuromodulation Therapy: MADRS reduction 52.5% active against 11.1% sham at 4 weeks, 29 treated of 32 enrolled, at a planned interim analysis. No stated position in any other disorder.	The much-quoted SAINT remission of about 90% and the IPS guideline's 86.4% are two reported figures for the SAME OPEN-LABEL protocol, not two designs; neither is the randomised 52.5% MADRS reduction at 4 weeks. Attribute each figure to its document; never merge. A non-inferiority result licenses substitution on time, not a claim of greater efficacy.

THE TRAP: THE ENTRY COUNTS IN COLUMN TWO ARE IN DIFFERENT CURRENCIES AND DO NOT CONVERT

Three selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors is a count of ONE drug class for ONE indication. Four or more adequate antidepressant treatments counts treatments of any class, and adequate qualifies the response as well as the treatment. Two or more adequate pharmacologic trials is a third unit, and RANZCP fixes no number while also requiring a failed psychological treatment. An unattributed threshold is right only by accident, so name the body in the same breath as the number.

ACTIVE-TREATMENT NETWORK COMPARISONS, AND WHERE NO DIRECT COMPARISON EXISTS

A NETWORK analysis reviewed by the IPS rTMS guideline, which pools direct with indirect evidence and is never the result of a direct trial, found ECT in one specified form of delivery associated with higher response than high-frequency left rTMS, than continuous theta-burst stimulation and than deep TMS; that form belongs to the ECT and neurostimulation notes.
No trial read for this chapter compares tDCS directly against rTMS, so the only comparison between those two is the position NICE gave each, one step apart.
Efficacy and acceptability are separate axes, and this frame carries the efficacy one alone; an answer that reports only it is describing half the choice a patient makes.

DECLARED GAP, NOT FILLED: THE INDIAN POSITION FOR FIVE OF THE SIX MODALITIES

rTMS: no CDSCO classification entry, no Indian product or import licence for a named system, and no Indian indication-specific authorisation appears in any source read here, so a foreign clearance list must not be read across and the chapter does not assert that rTMS is approved in India for anything.
tDCS: transcranial electrical stimulation systems are classified by CDSCO at Neurological serial 127, Class B, which is classification and not approval, and no Asian country except Singapore and South Korea has approved such devices. No Indian clinical practice guideline sets indications or a place in the ladder for tDCS.
DBS: the deep brain electrical stimulation system is listed by CDSCO at Neurological serial 33, Class D, again a classification recording no approval or indication for use. Whether any Indian centre implants for a psychiatric indication, any product licence, any authorisation, and the cost in rupees, are all undocumented.
MST is not documented as available in India, and the Indian position on accelerated iTBS and imaging-targeted protocols is undocumented in the same way: no centre report, no Indian trial, no cost, and no statement on whether the imaging-targeting step is feasible in routine Indian services.

WHAT THIS PLATE DELIBERATELY DOES NOT CARRY. The procedural act for every modality named here belongs to the ECT and neurostimulation notes and is absent from this frame by design: electrode placement, stimulus dosing, motor-threshold referencing, coil specification and the peri-procedural apparatus. This frame is utility alone.

COLOUR KEY

- teal = a stated guideline or regulatory position, and the strength it carries
- grey = no position stated in the sources read here, and the boundary note
- coral = where the position is negative or null, and the trap that follows
- dashed outline = a declared absence in the sources read here

Fig 37.9 Neurostimulation utility across disorders: six modalities placed by entry point, by indication, and by the strength of the statement that grants each one. The entry column is a set of thresholds and not a sequence, because the counts are in different currencies and do not convert: no failure count at all for ECT where a rapid or definitive response is needed to avert harm, three limbs bound together in NICE TA59, two or more adequate pharmacologic trials for rTMS on a weak recommendation, three selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors for deep brain stimulation in obsessive-compulsive disorder, and four or more adequate antidepressant treatments for vagus nerve stimulation. Each modality is then graded disorder by disorder with its negative rungs printed beside its positive ones: rTMS is null in panic disorder and in clozapine-refractory schizophrenia, both named tDCS depression trials are null, and the VA/DoD guideline is against deep brain stimulation and vagus nerve stimulation outside research. ECT is the only modality in the frame with a randomised superiority result against drug treatment in depression. The Indian position is a declared absence for five of the six, and the procedural act for all six belongs to the ECT and neurostimulation notes. (IPS ECT and rTMS guidelines 2023; NICE TA59, HTG396, HTG382, HTG551; VA/DoD 2022; RANZCP 2020; UK ECT Review Group; CREST-MST; CORRECT-BD; THREE-D; Stanford Neuromodulation Therapy; US FDA HDE H050003 and PMA P970003/S050; CDSCO.)

A course is a treatment episode, not a treatment plan, and the aftercare decision is examined more often than it is taught. Where depression has responded to a course, the current NICE depression guidance directs that antidepressant medication or a psychological intervention be started or continued to prevent relapse and provide ongoing care, and that lithium augmentation of antidepressant medication be considered. Read the second limb precisely: the augmentation offered for consideration is of the antidepressant, and the modal is permissive, not directive.

GOOD TO REMEMBER

The commonest omission on a real ward is not in the decision to treat, it is in what is written on the discharge summary the week the course ends. A response achieved and then left unprotected is the predictable relapse, and the guidance names two protective options and one augmentation to consider, rather than leaving the choice to habit.

18.6 Cognitive adverse effects, and the gap in how they are measured

This is the half of the answer that separates a pass from a good mark, because the cognitive evidence is genuinely two-sided and most candidates give only one side. The Indian guideline names **retrograde amnesia** as one of the most distressing adverse effects and, in the same breath, as one that is difficult to measure using objective cognitive tests, and it places that statement in its guidance on monitoring during a course rather than in its guidance on consent.

The largest pooled analysis of objective cognitive testing found a course of treatment followed by recovery and then improvement past baseline, on twenty-four cognitive variables:

- From 0 to 3 days after treatment, a significant decrease in 72 percent of the variables, with effect sizes from -1.10 to -0.21.
- Between 4 and 15 days, all but one confidence interval included zero.
- Beyond 15 days, no negative effect sizes at all, and 57 percent of the variables significantly improved, with effect sizes from 0.35 to 0.75.

That is reassuring and it is incomplete, and the incompleteness is stated by the authors themselves: no standardised retrograde amnesia test was identified anywhere in the pooled studies. The recovery finding therefore does not cover the domain the Indian guideline calls the most distressing.

PITFALL

Answering a patient who reports lost memories of their own life by citing the objective recovery data. The measured domains recovered; the domain the patient is describing was not among the standardised measures. Offering the reassurance anyway tells a patient their experience contradicts the evidence when in fact the evidence is silent on it, and it is the fastest way to lose a person's trust in a treatment that has just worked.

What does exist for that domain is a separate meta-analysis of **autobiographical memory** measured against controls, pooling nine studies, 432 patients and 173 controls in adults with unipolar or bipolar moderate-to-severe depression, with maintenance courses excluded.

Immediately after treatment the patients had greater autobiographical memory loss than the controls, a moderate effect, with an interval from 0.35 to 0.75. From the patients' own side, a systematic review of patient perspectives found reported persistent memory loss ranging from **29 percent to 55 percent** across studies, and, unlike reported benefit, that rate did not appear to depend on whether the study was clinician-based or patient-based. The convergence matters: this is not a complaint that disappears when you ask a clinician instead.

18.7 Cardiac and systemic risk, stated at the right size

The systemic risk of the modality is small, real, and almost always misquoted in one of two directions. The largest meta-analysis, pooling 82 studies, 106,569 patients and 786,995 treatments, found the three most commonly reported **major adverse cardiac events** to be acute heart failure, arrhythmia and acute pulmonary edema. The pooled incidences were 24 per 1,000 patients for acute heart failure, **25.83 per 1,000 patients for arrhythmia** and 4.92 per 1,000 patients for acute pulmonary edema. Restated against treatments rather than patients they fall to 2.44, 4.66 and 1.50 per 1,000 ECT treatments respectively, and the difference between those two denominators is the whole point: a patient receiving a course is exposed repeatedly, so the per-patient figure is the one that answers "what is my risk", and the per-treatment figure is the one that answers "what is the risk of this session".

One further caution about that literature, and it is a correctness point rather than a nuance. The pooled mortality construct in the same review is all-cause death within 30 days of treatment, which is not the same thing as death attributed to the treatment. Writing it as a mortality rate for the modality overstates it, and an examiner who knows the source will read that as a failure to read it.

18.8 Regulation of the modality in India, and what is actually practised

Indian law regulates this modality directly, which is unusual and therefore heavily examined. **Unmodified electroconvulsive therapy** means the treatment given without muscle relaxants and anaesthesia, and Section 95(1) of the Mental Healthcare Act 2017 prohibits it for any person with mental illness, and prohibits the treatment in minors. The prohibition in minors is not absolute: Section 95(2) provides that notwithstanding sub-section (1), if the psychiatrist in charge of a minor's treatment is of the opinion that the treatment is required, it shall be done with the informed consent of the guardian and prior permission of the concerned Board. Separately, Section 94(3) of the same Act provides that nothing in its emergency-treatment section permits a medical officer or psychiatrist to use the treatment as a form of emergency treatment, while emergency treatment itself is limited to 72 hours, extendable to seven days in a declared disaster or emergency.

IN INDIA

Hold the two rules together and a real clinical decision falls out of them. The Indian guideline places the treatment first-line precisely where a rapid response is needed to avert harm, which is exactly the presentation that arrives out of hours and feels like an emergency. The statute closes the emergency-treatment route for this modality. So the lawful path to treating that patient quickly is the consent or supported-admission pathway, started at once rather than after the emergency window has been used up on something else. The clinician who plans for the consent route on the first evening treats sooner than the one who reaches for the emergency provision and discovers it is unavailable.

Regional practice diverges from the northern-hemisphere guidance in a way that is worth stating plainly in an Indian answer. Across South Asia the treatment is widely practised, most commonly delivered with brief-pulse devices in its modified form; schizophrenia, not affective illness, is the commonest indication in the region; electroencephalographic monitoring of seizures is rarely practised; and practice guidelines for the modality are available only in India.

TRAP **Quoting the British position on schizophrenia in an Indian answer without naming the divergence.** One body declines to recommend general use in schizophrenia on the state of the evidence; in this region schizophrenia is the commonest indication for which the treatment is given, and the Indian guideline's indication table is written accordingly. Both are true statements about different things, and the marks go to the candidate who states both and labels which is which, not to the one who picks the tidier of the two.

An answer on this modality is complete only when it carries the trigger, the evidence at its true strength in each disorder, the memory cost including the domain nobody has measured well, and the Indian statute that governs how it may lawfully be given.

19 · Repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation (rTMS): mechanism, protocols and indications

A ten-mark answer on rTMS is an answer about utility, not about apparatus. Repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation is the neuromodulation technique most likely to reach an ordinary outpatient, and the marks fall on four questions: what the magnetic field does to cortex, where the modality sits once drugs have failed, which disorders it has earned an indication in and on what strength of evidence, and what happens to the patient once the course finishes. The delivery technique itself, and the machinery of safe administration that surrounds it, are set out in the ECT and neurostimulation notes; what follows is the modality and its utility across disorders.

The commonest way to lose these marks is to answer as though rTMS were one treatment with one indication. It is a family of protocols whose evidence is graded disorder by disorder, at strengths that run from strong to frankly negative, and the bodies that recommend it do not agree on how much treatment should have failed before it is offered. Separate the disorders, attribute the guidelines, and the answer organises itself.

19.1 What the field does, and the sentence that defines the modality

In **transcranial magnetic stimulation** the stimulator is discharged to produce a strong time-varying magnetic field, briefly peaking at **1 to 2.5 Tesla** and lasting 1 ms at most. A field of that strength crosses scalp and skull with little attenuation, and that is the property that makes the technique non-invasive. Non-invasive is not the same as unfelt: scalp discomfort, scalp pain and headache are recognised effects of the stimulation itself, and they belong in the consent conversation rather than in a claim that the treatment cannot be felt. Where the field meets conducting tissue it induces an electric current, and where that induced current is large enough it depolarises cortical neurons directly rather than through a peripheral route.

A single pulse probes the motor system and is a neurophysiological measurement tool. What makes the technique therapeutic is repetition: pulses delivered repeatedly within a session, and sessions repeated over weeks, shift cortical excitability in a direction that outlasts the stimulation itself. That outlasting shift, not the individual pulse, is what the treatment is betting on, and it is the reason a course is counted in sessions rather than in minutes of stimulation. The frequency of delivery influences the direction of that shift, which is why the evidence below is reported as high-frequency or low-frequency stimulation to a named cortical target rather than as rTMS in the abstract. Frequency does not settle the direction on its own: intensity, the pattern in which the pulses are grouped, the amount of stimulation delivered, the target and the state of the cortex at the time all bear on which way the after-effect goes, and the parameters themselves belong to the procedural notes. Treat the pairing of high frequency with excitation and low frequency with inhibition as a heuristic that organises the literature, not as a law.

RULE **Therapeutic rTMS is deliberately sub-convulsive.** The seizure is the event the treatment is designed to avoid, not the event it is designed to produce. That single sentence separates rTMS cleanly from convulsive therapy and from magnetic seizure therapy, whose purpose is the opposite, and every safety statement made about rTMS follows from it.

19.2 Where the modality sits once drugs have failed

The Indian Psychiatric Society issues its own clinical practice guideline for the therapeutic use of rTMS in neuropsychiatric disorders, and its governing statement about placement is not about any single disorder. rTMS is to be used as an **adjunct** to other conventional treatments, and the guideline records that this is how it had been given in almost every meta-analysis it reviewed, across almost every condition it examined. The point is methodological before it is clinical: most of the effect sizes quoted for rTMS are effect sizes for rTMS added to something else, and reading them as the performance of rTMS given alone overstates them. Check the individual estimate before treating it as evidence for augmentation.

RULE **The evidence prices rTMS as an addition, not a substitution.** In treatment-resistant depression specifically, the same guideline finds response to rTMS better when it is added as an **augmentation** to antidepressants than when it is given stand-alone. The prescription that continues alongside the course is part of the treatment being tested.

PITFALL

Stopping or tapering the antidepressant when the rTMS course begins, on the reasoning that the patient is now getting something better. The comparison behind the guideline's own position was augmentation against stand-alone treatment, and it favoured augmentation. A patient whose drug is withdrawn at the first session is no longer receiving the treatment the evidence describes.

Where the bodies genuinely differ is on how much failure should precede the referral, and the differences are not cosmetic. Read the table below across the third column as much as the second: a threshold carries the authority of the statement that sets it, and two of these four are explicit that their statement is weak.

BODY	WHERE IT PLACES RTMS	STRENGTH OF THAT STATEMENT
Indian Psychiatric Society rTMS guideline	An adjunct to conventional treatment across the conditions reviewed, with the depression evidence graded strong	Guideline recommendation resting on graded evidence
VA/DoD major depressive disorder guideline	Suggests offering rTMS to patients showing partial or no response to **two or more adequate pharmacologic treatment trials**	Weak recommendation, very low certainty
RANZCP mood disorders guideline	Before rTMS is considered, failure to respond to a reasonable number of adequate trials of both pharmacotherapy and psychological treatment	Graded CBR, consensus-based rather than evidence-based
NICE	rTMS for depression may be used with normal arrangements for clinical governance and audit	Short-term efficacy adequate, clinical response variable

TRAP **Quoting a single line of therapy for rTMS as though the field agreed on one.** One body counts failed drug trials and fixes a number. Another requires failed drug and failed psychological treatment but deliberately fixes no number, and grades that requirement as consensus rather than evidence. The regulatory clearance that first put the device into practice was written against a different bar again from either. An unattributed threshold is therefore right only by accident: state whose threshold you are using in the same breath as the number.

19.3 Depression: the indication the modality rests on

The Indian guideline grades the evidence for rTMS in depression as strong, with pooled effect sizes for improvement in depression severity spanning **0.302 to 0.83**. It also gives the two dichotomous outcomes an examiner is most likely to ask for: pooled odds ratios for response between 3.26 and 3.64, and for remission between 2.45 and 4.63. Quote both kinds of number if the question allows it, because they answer different questions. The effect size says how far the depression score moves; the odds ratio compares the odds of crossing a response or a remission threshold under active stimulation against the odds under sham. It is not a statement of how

many times more likely this patient is to respond, because an absolute probability needs the sham event rate, and no such rate is reported here. A wide effect-size range with a consistent odds ratio is exactly what a heterogeneous but genuinely active treatment looks like.

United Kingdom guidance arrives at a compatible destination by a different route, and its wording is worth memorising rather than paraphrasing. NICE judges the evidence on short-term efficacy adequate although the clinical response is variable, and states that rTMS for depression may be used with normal arrangements for clinical governance and audit. Both halves matter. The permissive modal is not an endorsement of first-line use, and the phrase about normal arrangements is a positioning statement rather than an efficacy claim: it says the procedure needs no special oversight, not that it works better than the alternatives. Note also that the depression guideline itself sets no rTMS recommendation of its own. NICE NG222 cross-refers to the interventional-procedures guidance IPG542, so a candidate who cites the depression guideline as the source of an rTMS recommendation is in fact citing a signpost.

19.4 What the acute course actually buys

A course buys a response; it does not settle the illness. Among patients who respond to rTMS for depression at the end of the acute course, the proportion still holding that **sustained response** falls steadily across the following year.

66.5%	52.9%	46.3%
THIRD-MONTH RESPONSE HELD	SIXTH-MONTH RESPONSE HELD	TWELFTH-MONTH RESPONSE HELD

Read those three figures as one statement rather than as three facts. Roughly two thirds of initial responders are still responders a quarter of a year later, and rather under half of them at a year, with confidence intervals that widen as the follow-up lengthens because fewer studies report the later points. Two consequences follow for how the treatment is offered. First, the acute course is a planning point rather than a discharge point, and the maintenance question has to be raised before the last session rather than after the relapse. Second, these three figures measure the durability of response among patients who responded acutely, and response and remission are distinct outcomes, so no claim about durable remission can rest on them. No figure for sustained remission is reported here at all, and the honest answer says so rather than reusing these proportions for it.

> **GOOD TO REMEMBER**
>
> Book the review before the course ends, not after it. The attrition of response is steepest in the first half of the year, so a patient discharged to routine follow-up at three months is being reviewed on the shoulder of the curve rather than on its plateau. Telling the patient the shape of that curve at the outset also protects the alliance if the response fades.

19.5 The indication ladder beyond unipolar depression

The remaining indications are graded individually and the grades are not interchangeable. The examinable skill is to reproduce the ladder with each rung labelled by its own strength, including

the rungs where the evidence is negative, since an answer that lists only the positive indications is describing a marketing brochure rather than a guideline.

CONDITION	EVIDENCE POSITION	WHAT THE NUMBERS AND THE COURSE LOOK LIKE
Acute bipolar depression	Moderate and positive	Effect size 0.302, odds ratio for response 2.72
Obsessive-compulsive disorder	Moderately positive	Pooled Y-BOCS SMDs 0.501 to 0.79, across 10 to 30 sessions given over 1 to 12 weeks
Generalised anxiety disorder	Significant effect	Pooled effect sizes 1.45 to 1.87; depression accompanying the anxiety improves too, at SMD 1.65
Panic disorder	Not found effective	No effect demonstrated on the pooled analysis
Treatment-resistant auditory hallucinations	Moderate and positive	Pooled SMDs 0.24 to 0.51, across 4 to 40 sessions delivered up to 8 weeks
Negative symptoms of schizophrenia	Moderate to large and positive	SMD 0.49 to 0.64; high-frequency stimulation to the left DLPFC and more than 10 sessions superior to sham
Clozapine-refractory schizophrenia	No significant effect	Three randomised trials of rTMS augmentation, not significant for positive symptoms, negative symptoms or cognition
Tobacco use disorder	Positive	High-frequency rTMS targeted at the left DLPFC reduces both craving and the amount consumed
Other substance use disorders	Not consistent	The evidence does not converge across substances

Two rows on that ladder repay closer reading. The schizophrenia entries are not one finding: negative symptoms carry the strongest signal in the disorder, resistant hallucinations a smaller but real one, and **clozapine-refractory schizophrenia** carries no significant effect at all on any of the three outcome domains examined. That last row is the one candidates forget, and it is precisely the clinical situation in which a desperate team is most tempted to add a device. Treatment resistance in schizophrenia and the place of clozapine within it are handled as a topic of their own; what belongs here is only that adding rTMS on top of clozapine did not separate from sham.

The obsessive-compulsive row carries a disagreement that should be stated rather than resolved. The Indian guideline's own reading is that the evidence for deep TMS in obsessive-compulsive disorder is inconclusive and insufficient, while the regulatory record reproduced inside that same

document lists a **deep TMS** clearance for obsessive-compulsive disorder in 2018. These are different currencies rather than contradictory facts: a regulator asks whether a device is reasonably safe and effective for a labelled use, a guideline panel asks whether pooled trial data reach a grade. Print both, attributed to their sources, and say which question each is answering.

TRAP **Writing that rTMS works in anxiety disorders.** It has a significant effect in **generalised anxiety disorder**, with the depression that accompanies it improving as well, but it was not found effective in panic disorder. Candidates generalise across a diagnostic block because the ladder is memorised as a list of positives, and the negative rungs are where an examiner separates a memorised list from an understood one.

19.6 Where the modality stops, and how it compares with the alternatives

The Indian guideline draws one explicit boundary: it does not recommend rTMS for acutely suicidal patients. That is a positioning statement about tempo rather than about efficacy in depression, and it is the single most examinable sentence in the Indian document, because it identifies the presentation in which this modality is not the answer however strong its depression evidence is elsewhere.

In a network meta-analysis reviewed by the same guideline, in the comparisons between two active treatments, ECT was associated with higher response than high-frequency left rTMS, than continuous theta-burst stimulation, and than deep TMS. A network estimate pools direct and indirect evidence, so report it as a network comparison and never as the result of a trial that compared the two treatments directly. The analysis specified one particular form of ECT delivery, and that specification belongs to the ECT and neurostimulation notes rather than here. A separate analysis in the same reviewed set reported bilateral rTMS more acceptable than ECT, and, in treatment-resistant depression, more effective than deep brain stimulation. Efficacy and acceptability are separate axes; the two findings sit beside each other rather than against each other, and an answer that reports only the first is describing half the choice a patient is actually making.

IN INDIA

The controlling document for this modality is the Indian Psychiatric Society's own rTMS guideline, and it settles two decisions a candidate should be able to state without hesitation. First, the Indian guideline places rTMS as an adjunct to conventional treatment rather than a substitute for it, and that is this guideline's position rather than a universal restriction, since rTMS is not confined to augmentation everywhere. Keep the concomitant antidepressant or antipsychotic stable through the course where that is clinically feasible; if it has to change, the safety of continuing is reviewed rather than assumed, and the parameter side of that review belongs to the procedural notes. Second, it explicitly does not recommend rTMS in acute suicidality, so the acutely suicidal presentation is the boundary at which this modality stops and the alternatives are weighed on their own evidence rather than on an extension of this one.

19.7 Safety, stated at the right size

Safety belongs inside a utility answer rather than appended to it, because the whole clinical case for rTMS is that it delivers a moderate effect at a very low cost in risk. Seizure is the serious adverse event, and its measured rate is very low: a large safety survey reported **7 seizures per 100,000 sessions** overall, from 24 seizures in over 300,000 sessions, rising to 33 per 100,000 sessions among people carrying an identified risk factor. The consensus that reports those figures is careful about them: the survey data cannot be considered more than approximate and may carry reporting biases, so quote the order of magnitude with the caveat attached rather than the decimal with false precision.

The controlled evidence in depression separates the serious from the merely common, and that separation is the shape of the answer.

- Across 53 sham-controlled trials in depression there was no increased risk of serious adverse events.
- There was no increased risk of drop-outs attributable to an adverse event, so tolerability did not differ from sham on the measure that matters for completing a course.
- There was a significantly greater risk of mild, transient, non-serious events, which is where the real difference from sham sits and what consent should describe.
- The same guideline reports no signal of affective switch with rTMS protocols used to treat depression, which is the question a bipolar-spectrum patient's team will ask first.

19.8 The regulatory picture, and rTMS in Indian practice

United States clearance began in depression and widened by indication over the following sixteen years: 2008 for the first TMS system in major depressive disorder, 2013 for the first deep TMS system in the same indication, 2018 for deep TMS in obsessive-compulsive disorder and separately for the first theta-burst-capable system in major depressive disorder, 2020 for smoking cessation, 2021 for deep TMS in major depressive disorder with anxiety, 2022 for an accelerated protocol system in major depressive disorder, and 2024 for major depressive disorder in adolescents aged 15 to 21. Theta-burst and the accelerated protocols are substantial topics in their own right; here they matter only as the shape of the widening, which has moved from one diagnosis, to new diagnoses, to new populations.

None of that is an Indian authorisation, and the distinction has to be made explicitly rather than left to the reader. No device classification, product or import licence, or indication-specific Indian authorisation for any named rTMS system is stated in this account, and a foreign clearance list must not be read across as one. The defensible examination sentence is that rTMS is in established clinical use in India while the Indian regulatory position is not something to assert from another country's labelling.

What is documented is the service picture. TMS services began to be offered by private practitioners in India from the mid-2000s, initially concentrated in metropolitan cities, and treatment centres are now established in smaller cities as well; the concerns that persist are variability in standards of care, high treatment costs, and limited accessibility for the general

population. Training infrastructure has grown alongside the services: a one-year fellowship in **non-invasive brain stimulation** has been offered since 2016, aimed at developing clinical and research expertise in the area. For an Indian answer, that pairing is the honest one to give, because it names both the spread of the modality and the unevenness of the standards under which it has spread.

MNEMONIC

Disorder, Threshold, Adjunct, Durability

The four things a modality answer on rTMS must settle: which disorder, and therefore which grade of evidence applies; whose threshold of prior failure is being quoted; that the treatment is added to conventional care rather than substituted for it; and what proportion of responders are still responding a year later.

The closing position is best stated without inflation, and a recent Indian review, Praharaj in the Indian Journal of Psychiatry in 2025, supplies it whole rather than by halves: the exact role of TMS in the treatment of psychiatric disorders remains uncertain, although it appears to offer benefit in mild to moderate cases, particularly for the short-term treatment of depression. Print that as the review's own position, with its author and year attached, and then set the guideline evidence beside it rather than in place of it, because the two are grading different things. The review is grading severity of illness. The guidelines are grading prior treatment failure, and prior failure is not a severity band: a patient can fail two adequate trials of moderate illness, and a patient with severe illness can be drug-naive. The Indian guideline grades acute depression strong and finds augmentation superior to stand-alone rTMS in treatment-resistant depression, and the VA/DoD statement is written for patients with partial or no response to two or more adequate pharmacologic trials. None of that says anything about how severe the illness was, so none of it refutes the review's severity clause. Hold both, each attributed to the body stating it, and note that the grade everywhere else runs disorder by disorder. That is not a weak answer. It is the accurate one, and it is what lets a candidate hold the strong depression grading and the negative clozapine-refractory row in the same paragraph without contradiction.

rTMS is an adjunct with its strongest evidence in depression, a disorder-by-disorder grading everywhere else, no recommendation in acute suicidality, and a response that has to be maintained rather than assumed.

20 · Transcranial direct current stimulation (tDCS)

This is the modality that is easiest to describe and hardest to place. Transcranial direct current stimulation passes a weak, steady current between contacts on the scalp. It is simple to deliver and it has been trialled across most psychiatric diagnoses, and that combination is precisely why a full-length answer on tDCS is not an answer about promise. The marks sit in four places, and a candidate who supplies only the first loses most of them: what the technique is, in a family that has an explicit boundary; what it does to a neuron, which is not what the seizure-

based and magnetic techniques do; what the best-designed depression trials returned when they asked the question properly; and where guidance and regulators, having read those trials, have actually put it.

The procedural technique is set out in the ECT and neurostimulation notes and is not repeated here. What follows is the modality itself and the honest evidence position across disorders, which is a different examination question and is answered with different material.

20.1 What the technique is, and the family it belongs to

tDCS belongs to a defined family, **low-intensity transcranial electrical stimulation**, and the family is bounded by an explicit dose envelope rather than by an indication or a mechanism. That is an unusual way to define a treatment and it is worth pausing on: the boundary is a set of physical limits on the current delivered, so anything inside those limits belongs to the family and anything outside it is a different technique with a different safety literature. The safety and guidance paper for low-intensity transcranial electrical stimulation sets a ceiling on total current, a frequency span, and a ceiling on how long a single session may run.

4 mA or less	0 to 10,000 Hz	up to 60 minutes per session
TOTAL INTENSITY CEILING	FREQUENCY SPAN OF THE FAMILY	LONGEST SINGLE SESSION

The frequency span is the limb that explains the family's shape. Direct current sits at the zero-frequency end of it, which is what the middle word of the technique's name means: the current does not oscillate, it holds a constant direction for the whole session. The alternating-current members of the same family occupy the rest of the span, and for those the intensity ceiling is expressed peak-to-peak rather than as a steady value, because an oscillating waveform swings either side of zero and its amplitude has to be quoted across the full swing. One envelope therefore holds several techniques that look different at the bedside and are grouped within one consensus safety framework for low-intensity transcranial electrical stimulation.

Two cautions about the envelope. It is a definitional and safety boundary agreed by the field, not a legal classification that holds in every jurisdiction, and it is not a therapeutic prescription: nothing in it says what current a given patient should receive, and how a session is actually configured belongs to the procedural chapter named above. And a boundary drawn around a family is not evidence about any member of it. The envelope tells you what tDCS is; it tells you nothing at all about whether it works.

20.2 The mechanism, and why it is the answer's spine

tDCS acts by **subthreshold neuronal polarisation**, which is to say it does not itself generate action potentials. The current shifts the **membrane potential** of neurons in the field without directly bringing them to threshold, and thereby changes how likely they are to fire in response to synaptic input they are already receiving. The safety and guidance paper states this as the mechanistic contrast with rTMS and with ECT, and it is the single most examinable sentence in the topic.

RULE **tDCS does not directly trigger action potentials. It shifts membrane potential and changes how likely neurons are to fire in response to synaptic input they are already receiving.** Every other property of the modality follows from this. A technique that biases ongoing activity rather than driving it produces no directly evoked motor response to titrate against, unlike a suprathreshold technique, and its effects may be state-dependent, varying with what the cortex is already doing while the current is applied. Write this sentence first and the rest of the answer organises itself around it.

Two corollaries follow from the definition rather than from any separate finding, and stating them as derivations is safer than presenting them as results. First, the effect can be expected to be state-dependent: if the current only changes a probability of firing, then what the neuron is already doing is part of the outcome, which is why the same delivered current need not be the same intervention in two different patients or in the same patient on two different occasions. Second, the distance between this mechanism and a clinical response is very long. A membrane-potential shift is several inferential steps away from a change in mood or in a symptom score, and that gap is where the modality's evidence problem lives.

20.3 Polarity, and why the classroom rule is not a law

Every candidate has met the rule that the anode excites and the cathode inhibits. It is a useful first approximation and it is how the technique is usually introduced. It is also the single most confidently over-stated fact in this topic. The same passage that establishes the subthreshold mechanism qualifies it directly: the mechanisms of low-intensity transcranial electrical stimulation vary with the properties of the current applied and with how that current is applied, so the polarity heuristic cannot be printed as a universal rule.

TRAP **Writing "anodal stimulation is excitatory, cathodal is inhibitory" as a law of the modality.** Candidates make this error because the heuristic is how the technique is taught, because it is easy to remember, and because it has the satisfying symmetry of a real physical law. The source that establishes the mechanism explicitly qualifies the direction of effect as varying with the properties of the current and with the way it is delivered. The safe examination form is to state the heuristic as a heuristic, say what it is derived from, and then state the qualification in the same breath. An examiner who has read the current guidance is looking for the qualification, not for the rule.

20.4 Depression: the two named trials

Depression is where the modality has been tested hardest, and two trials are named here because each was designed to answer a different question and each returned a result the candidate must be able to state precisely. In **ELECT-TDCS**, a **single-centre trial**, tDCS did not show non-inferiority to escitalopram over **10 weeks** in the treatment of depression, and it was associated with more adverse events than the drug comparator. That limit belongs to the result itself and should travel with it whenever the trial is cited.

The second is DepressionDC. A published analysis from that trial records that the main trial did not show beneficial antidepressant effects of active tDCS over **sham** tDCS. The provenance of that sentence is worth stating rather than hiding: it is drawn from a subsequent peer-reviewed

report by the same investigators and not from the primary publication, so it is a faithful account of the main trial's result as its own authors describe it.

AXIS ON WHICH THE TWO DESIGNS DIFFER	ELECT-TDCS	DEPRESSIONDC
What active tDCS was compared against	An active drug comparator, escitalopram	Sham stimulation
Question the design is built to answer	Non-inferiority: is the device not meaningfully worse than the drug	Superiority: does active stimulation beat sham
What the null answer licenses	That the trial could not exclude a meaningful shortfall against the drug; not that the technique is inert	That active stimulation did not beat sham in that trial's population; not that it must fail in every population
Limit the source states alongside the result	A single-centre trial	The statement used here comes from a later report by the same investigators

20.5 What those results license, and what they do not

A failed trial and an ineffective treatment are not the same object. This is the reasoning the neuromodulation questions are actually testing, and it is where most answers go wrong in the same direction. A **non-inferiority** design asks whether the new intervention falls short of the comparator by more than a pre-specified margin. Failing to demonstrate non-inferiority means the trial could not rule that shortfall out. It does not mean the intervention did nothing, it does not mean the comparator was superior, and it certainly does not mean the modality has been refuted. A sham-controlled superiority design asks a different question, and a null there is a statement about that contrast, in that population, at the parameters that trial used.

The discipline this imposes on an answer is specific. State each trial by name with its own comparator and its own result, and stop. Do not aggregate two negative results into a verdict on the modality, and do not soften them into a vague statement that the trials have been disappointing, which sounds cautious but is an unsourced summary claim in disguise. Nothing here supports a statement about what the tDCS depression literature as a whole has shown, and an answer that offers one has left the evidence behind.

TRAP **Collapsing two named negative trials into "tDCS does not work".** This is a different error from the polarity one and it is made by the better-read candidates, who know the trials and over-read them. Two results, one against an active drug and one against sham, are two data points with their own designs, populations and stated limits. Neither was designed to answer whether the modality has utility in any other disorder, and neither can be extended to one. The correct answer names the trials, states what each showed, and says plainly what remains unsettled.

20.6 Tolerability, and the assumption a low current invites

The intensity envelope makes tDCS feel like a low-risk intervention, and the temptation is to write that it is well tolerated and move on. The one head-to-head comparison available here does

not support that shortcut. In the trial against escitalopram, tDCS was associated with more adverse events than the drug, and the events reported in that comparison were specific rather than trivial.

- Higher rates of skin redness in the tDCS group.
- Higher rates of tinnitus.
- Higher rates of nervousness.
- **New-onset mania** in the tDCS group.

> **PITFALL**
>
> Reading a low current as a low adverse-event rate. The two are separate questions and this modality separates them: the envelope is at the low end of what electrical stimulation can deliver, and the one trial read here that compared it directly against a drug still recorded more adverse events on the device arm. The clinical error that follows is describing tDCS to a patient as the option with fewer side effects, which is a comparative claim the evidence read here contradicts rather than supports.

The appearance of new-onset mania in the reported events is the item to carry away, because it is the one that changes what is asked before treatment and requires monitoring for emergent hypomanic or manic symptoms during treatment. A mood-disorder history is part of the picture for any intervention given with antidepressant intent, and the reported event list, not the current intensity, is the honest basis for that conversation.

20.7 Where guidance places the modality

Guidance positions are examinable in their own right, and this one has a distinctive shape. NICE places tDCS for depression under **special arrangements**, and the arrangements it names are clinical governance, consent, and audit or research. That is a category in its own right and it should be read as one: it is neither a prohibition nor an endorsement of routine use, but a position that permits the procedure while requiring that its use be governed, consented and either audited or conducted as research. NICE puts tDCS for depression in a lower position than it gives rTMS, and the comparison is part of the answer, because a candidate who states the tDCS position without that relative placement has given a fact without its meaning.

That relative placement is the only direct cross-modality comparison available here, and it must not be treated as the sole clinical basis for choosing when a patient could plausibly be offered either non-convulsive technique. There is no head-to-head trial here putting tDCS against rTMS, so the choice between them is not made on a direct comparison of outcomes. What this account holds is the position each has been given by the body that reviewed them, and on that basis tDCS is the one carrying the additional governance, consent and audit conditions. Other considerations that bear on the choice, including each technique's own adverse-effect profile, its contraindications and what the service can actually deliver, sit outside what the evidence read here covers. Saying so plainly is more defensible than manufacturing a comparison the evidence does not contain.

GOOD TO REMEMBER

If tDCS is being offered for depression, the consent conversation is not the same conversation as for an established treatment. The position it rests on names consent and audit or research as conditions of use, which means the patient is being told that the intervention sits in a governed category rather than in routine practice, and that the service is expected to record what happens. Building that into the conversation is not extra caution; it is the position itself.

20.8 The Indian position: classified, not approved

India has a regulatory record for this technology and it is easy to misread. Transcranial electrical stimulation systems are classified by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation as a **medical device**, at **Neurological serial 127**, Class B. The classification entry's own intended-use text names transcranial direct current stimulation and transcranial alternating current stimulation for psychiatric or neurological therapy, so the technology is recognised by name. Classification is not approval. It places a device in a risk class for regulatory purposes; it does not certify that the device works for a named indication. The wider position is that no Asian country other than Singapore and South Korea has approved tES devices, so India holds classification without indication approval.

IN INDIA

There is no Indian national clinical practice guideline setting indications, evidence grades or a place in the treatment ladder for tDCS in psychiatric disorders. That absence is the operative fact, not an omission from this account. The consequence for practice is concrete: the position an Indian clinician is working from is a guidance position derived from NICE plus the named trial evidence, and it should be presented to the patient and recorded in the notes as exactly that. Because classification at Class B is not approval for a psychiatric indication, the decision to offer tDCS is a governed, consented and documented one taken on the trial record, not one taken on the strength of an approved indication or of a domestic guideline that does not exist.

MNEMONIC

Envelope, Polarity, Trials, Position

The four beats of a full tDCS answer, in the order that earns marks. Envelope: the family and the physical limits that define it. Polarity: the subthreshold mechanism and the heuristic that must not be stated as a law. Trials: the named depression trials with their own comparators and their own limits. Position: what guidance permits and what Indian regulation has and has not done. An answer missing the last two beats is a description, not an answer.

Set beside the other techniques, tDCS occupies a distinctive place: a mechanism that is well characterised and modest, an evidence base in depression that is specific, named and unfavourable in the two trials read here, a guidance position that permits use only under governance, consent and audit or research, and an Indian regulatory record that recognises the device without approving an indication for it. Each of those four is a fact a candidate can state

and defend. The temptation is to replace them with a general impression of a promising low-cost treatment, and that impression is the one thing in this topic that nothing here supports.

tDCS biases firing rather than driving it, and every honest claim about it - mechanism, evidence and regulatory position - is smaller and more specific than the enthusiasm the technique attracts.

21 · Deep brain stimulation and vagus nerve stimulation in psychiatry

Two of the neurostimulation answers require an implanted system. Deep brain stimulation and vagus nerve stimulation sit at the far end of the treatment sequence, reached only after documented pharmacological failure, and a full-mark answer on either is marked on four things: what the device is, where it acts, which disorders it has been used in, and how strong the evidence actually is. Two errors cost most of the marks. The first is promoting a regulatory status into an efficacy claim, which is easy to do because the regulatory language is written to sound like endorsement. The second is answering with the operation instead of the modality. The procedural technique, the consent and legal frame around the operation itself, and the ethics and cost-equity arguments are set out in the ECT and neurostimulation notes; what follows is the modality and its utility across disorders.

21.1 A circuit therapy, not a reversible lesion

The first conceptual correction is the one examiners look for, and it is worth opening an answer with. **Deep brain stimulation** is now better described as a **circuit therapy** and not as a reversible lesion, though it was initially conceptualised as one, a framing that made it the ablative operations' safer successor and that still shapes how referrers and families talk about it. The delivered pulses trigger action potentials in axons both orthodromically and antidromically, and the new patterns of synaptic activity this generates overwrite the pathological ones.

The distinction is not semantic, and it changes three things in an answer. It explains why the effect can be modulated or withdrawn entirely without any tissue having been removed, which is what separates this modality from the ablative procedures it descended from. It explains why the unit of treatment is a network rather than a structure, so that the clinical question is which circuit is being driven and not which nucleus is being destroyed. And it explains why the same anatomical target can support claims in more than one disorder: if the mechanism is the imposition of new activity patterns on a circuit, then any disorder in which that circuit is implicated becomes a candidate indication, which is exactly how the psychiatric target list was assembled.

RULE **A device authorisation names who may be treated, not how well the treatment works.** Both of the psychiatric authorisations discussed here are defined by a population and by a count of prior failed drug treatments. Neither is a statement about effect size, and the strength of the underlying evidence has to be read separately from the wording of the licence. Read the pathway, then read the trials, and never let the first stand in for the second.

21.2 The psychiatric targets, and why obsessive-compulsive disorder leads

Target selection is where a modality answer earns its structure, and obsessive-compulsive disorder is the psychiatric condition in which the target work has gone furthest. In deep brain stimulation for obsessive-compulsive disorder, the **ventral capsule/ventral striatum** and the nucleus accumbens have emerged as the most frequently investigated loci, with three further sites receiving substantial attention.

- Most frequently investigated: the ventral capsule/ventral striatum.
- Equally prominent: the nucleus accumbens.
- Substantial attention: the anterior limb of the internal capsule.
- Substantial attention: the bed nucleus of the stria terminalis.
- Substantial attention: the subthalamic nucleus.

Two observations make this list examinable rather than a memory exercise. First, the sites are not independent of one another: they cluster in and around the ventral striatal and capsular territory through which cortico-striato-thalamo-cortical traffic passes, which is the anatomical reason a single disorder produced several candidate targets rather than one. Second, the fact that five targets remain under investigation is itself the evidence position. A field that had settled its target would not still be studying five, and an answer that names one target as the target has misread the state of the literature. Say which are studied most, say the rest are actively studied, and resist the temptation to declare a winner.

21.3 The regulatory footing in obsessive-compulsive disorder

The United States authorisation for this indication is a **Humanitarian Device Exemption** and not a **premarket approval**, and the difference is the whole point. US FDA granted it as HDE H050003, with a decision date of 10 February 2009, for bilateral stimulation of the anterior limb of the internal capsule, as an adjunct to medications and as an alternative to anterior capsulotomy, for chronic severe treatment-resistant obsessive-compulsive disorder in adults who have failed **at least three** selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors.

Every clause in that sentence is load-bearing. The indication is bilateral. It is adjunctive, so the device is added to medication rather than replacing it. It is positioned clinically as an alternative to anterior capsulotomy; this wording does not establish that capsulotomy was a trial comparator. It is restricted to adults. And it carries the crispest prior-failure threshold anywhere in this modality group: a specific count, of a specific drug class, before the device becomes an option at all.

TRAP **Writing that deep brain stimulation is approved for obsessive-compulsive disorder.** A humanitarian device exemption is a humanitarian pathway carrying a probable-benefit standard, not a demonstration of effectiveness, and it is expressly not a premarket approval. Candidates make this error because the everyday word for any regulatory clearance is approval, and because the indication text reads exactly like a licence. Name the pathway, then the standard it applies, then the threshold it sets. That single sentence separates a candidate who has read the authorisation from one who has heard about it.

21.4 Deep brain stimulation in depression: the controlled evidence

Depression is the second psychiatric indication for which this modality has been pursued seriously, and it is the one on which the controlled evidence is clearest and least encouraging. The randomised, double-blind BROADEN trial did not show significant differences between active and sham stimulation at six months, and it was subsequently halted because of a low probability of success on an interim **futility analysis**.

Both halves of that sentence teach. A trial that fails to separate from sham has not shown that the device does nothing; it has shown that this design, in this population, at this time point, could not demonstrate that it does something, and open-label improvement in the same patients is entirely compatible with that result. But a trial stopped for futility is a stronger negative than a trial that merely misses significance, because the interim analysis has already concluded that continuing to the planned endpoint was unlikely to change the answer. An answer that reports the sham comparison without the futility stop understates the result; an answer that reports the futility stop as proof of inefficacy overstates it.

The guideline consequence follows directly. VA/DoD recommends against using deep brain stimulation for major depressive disorder outside a research setting, and does so at strong strength. Note the verb and the strength together, because both are the substance of the recommendation: this is a recommendation against, not a recommendation to consider carefully, and it is issued at the guideline's higher tier rather than its weaker one.

21.5 Vagus nerve stimulation: what the indication actually says

The second implanted modality is licensed the other way round. Where the obsessive-compulsive disorder authorisation came through a humanitarian route, **vagus nerve stimulation** in depression holds a premarket approval: US FDA P970003 supplement S050, with a decision date of 15 July 2005. The device is indicated for the adjunctive long-term treatment of chronic or recurrent depression, in patients 18 years of age or older who are in a major depressive episode and have not had an adequate response to **four or more** adequate antidepressant treatments.

Three words in that indication do most of the examinable work. Adjunctive means the device is used in addition to other treatment rather than in place of it, and the two authorisations say it with different force: the obsessive-compulsive disorder exemption reads adjunct to medications, while this one reads only adjunctive long-term treatment. Long-term is unusual in a device indication and is not decoration: it distinguishes the intended treatment horizon from an acute intervention, and it should not be relabelled as maintenance treatment, since the same indication requires that the patient be in a major depressive episode. Chronic or recurrent restricts the population by illness course, not merely by severity, so a first episode meets the illness-course limb only if it is chronic.

PITFALL

Counting prior failures loosely, or interchangeably between the two devices. The obsessive-compulsive disorder pathway counts a specific class, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors. The depression pathway counts, in the indication's own words, four or more adequate antidepressant treatments, and adds the word adequate twice, to the treatments and to the response; that indication text does not define those treatments by class. A clinician who tallies four failed drugs of mixed classes for the obsessive-compulsive disorder pathway, or three selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors for the depression pathway, has counted the wrong thing against the wrong threshold and has not established candidacy for either.

21.6 The evidence behind the vagus nerve stimulation indication

This is the single most misremembered fact in the whole modality group, and it is worth stating plainly: the acute sham-controlled trial behind the depression indication was negative. In the D-02 acute phase, **15.3 percent (17 of 111)** of the active stimulation group were considered responders against 10.0 percent (11 of 110) of the sham group, a difference that was not statistically significant, with p equal to 0.238. Support for the indication came instead from long-term open treatment and from nonrandomised comparative evidence, with the limitations that implies; in that uncontrolled long-term phase the reported 12-month HAM-D response was 29.8 percent and remission 17.1 percent.

Set those figures side by side and the structural problem in the evidence is visible without any statistical apparatus. The controlled comparison, which is the only part of the programme in which sham stimulation is present, produced a small and non-significant separation. The larger response proportion comes from a phase with no comparator, in which the passage of time, continued pharmacological treatment, regression to the mean and expectation all remain in the estimate. A candidate who quotes only the long-term figure has quoted the uncontrolled number as though it were a treatment effect.

The most recent evidence has not resolved this. RECOVER, described as the largest neuromodulation trial in psychiatry to date, did not meet its primary endpoint on preliminary reports, although clinically meaningful improvements were reported in depressive severity, functioning and quality of life. That combination, a missed primary endpoint alongside reported secondary improvements, is the recurring shape of this literature and should be described as such rather than resolved in either direction.

TRAP **Assuming a premarket approval implies a positive pivotal sham-controlled trial.** Here it does not. The acute controlled comparison was negative and the support came instead from long-term open treatment and nonrandomised comparative evidence, and the largest trial since has not met its primary endpoint either. This is a genuinely different error from mistaking the humanitarian pathway for approval: there the pathway was misread, here the pathway is read correctly and the evidence behind it is assumed rather than checked.

21.7 How the guideline bodies read the two devices

Guideline positions are more consistent across bodies than the target literature is, and they are the safest thing to reproduce under time pressure. A systematic review of clinical practice guidelines on deep brain stimulation for obsessive-compulsive disorder found that eight guidelines recommended it be used only after all other treatment options had failed to alleviate symptoms, and that one guideline did not recommend it beyond a research setting. In depression the positions are more restrictive still: VA/DoD recommends against deep brain stimulation outside research at strong strength, and suggests against vagus nerve stimulation outside research at weak strength. NICE places implanted vagus nerve stimulation for treatment-resistant depression under **special arrangements** for clinical governance, consent, and audit or research, in guidance now numbered HTG551 and formerly IPG679, published 12 August 2020.

at least 3	**4 or more**	**8**	**1**
SSRIS FAILED, US OCD PATHWAY	ANTIDEPRESSANT TRIALS, US VNS INDICATION	GUIDELINES: ONLY AFTER ALL ELSE FAILS	GUIDELINE: RESEARCH SETTING ONLY

Read the modal verbs against each other and a hierarchy appears. Recommends against is stronger than suggests against. Special arrangements is neither a prohibition nor an endorsement: it permits use while requiring the governance, consent and audit machinery that ordinary practice does not, which is what a body does when it is unwilling to close a door and unwilling to open it. Compared on the axes an examiner is likely to supply, the two devices separate cleanly.

AXIS	DEEP BRAIN STIMULATION	VAGUS NERVE STIMULATION
Lead psychiatric indication in the regulatory record	Chronic severe treatment-resistant obsessive-compulsive disorder in adults, adjunctive	Chronic or recurrent depression, adjunctive and long-term
Regulatory pathway	Humanitarian device exemption, not a premarket approval	Premarket approval supplement
Prior-failure threshold named in the authorisation	Failed at least three selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors	No adequate response to four or more adequate antidepressant treatments
Controlled evidence in depression	BROADEN did not separate from sham at six months and was stopped for futility	Acute sham-controlled phase negative; the largest trial to date did not meet its primary endpoint
Position in major depressive disorder	Recommends against outside research, strong	Suggests against outside research, weak

GOOD TO REMEMBER

When a patient or family raises a device after several failed trials, two answerable questions come before any discussion of the operation. How many adequate prior treatments have there actually been, counted against the threshold that belongs to that indication. And is the device being sought as a replacement for medication, which neither authorisation supports: the obsessive-compulsive disorder exemption is written as an adjunct to medications, and the depression approval as adjunctive long-term treatment.

21.8 The position in India, and the question the Act leaves open

The Indian regulatory picture is thinner than candidates expect, and the honest answer says so rather than filling the space. What is documented is a risk classification. CDSCO lists the deep brain electrical stimulation system in the Neurological category of its classification of medical devices as Class D. That is all it is. The cited document is a classification list; it records no approval and no indication for use, so it cannot be quoted as evidence that the device is authorised here for any psychiatric condition, and it says nothing at all about vagus nerve stimulation in depression.

What is not documented, and therefore not stated here, is whether any Indian centre currently implants these devices for a psychiatric indication and for how many patients, whether any product licence exists for a named system, whether any indication-specific authorisation exists, and what the treatment costs in rupees. Those are real questions and an answer is stronger for naming them as unanswered than for supplying a plausible figure. The equity and cost arguments around access to implanted neuromodulation are developed in the ECT and neurostimulation notes.

IN INDIA

Before any implanted device is offered for a psychiatric indication, establish whether the Board approval requirement applies. Under section 96 of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, **psychosurgery** is restricted: it requires the informed consent of the person on whom it is performed and, in addition, approval from the concerned Board. The Act does not define psychosurgery, so whether a reversible implanted system for refractory obsessive-compulsive disorder falls inside that restriction cannot be settled from the Act itself. The consequence of the ambiguity is concrete and binary. Either Board approval must be obtained before proceeding, or it need not, and no clinician should resolve that question informally. State the question, state what turns on it, and do not answer it.

MNEMONIC

Site, Stage, Sham, Stance

Four retrieval slots that fit any device answer, including one you have not revised. Site: what is stimulated and on what mechanistic account. Stage: what must have failed, and how many times, before the device is on the table. Sham: what the controlled comparison actually showed, as distinct from the open-label follow-up. Stance: what the guideline bodies recommend, in their own modal verbs and at their own strengths.

Each of these authorisations is defined by a count of prior failed drug treatments, and in depression the sham-controlled evidence for both devices did not separate.

22 · Magnetic seizure therapy and other emerging neurostimulation modalities

Every examination cycle asks for a modality nobody in the room has used. The emerging neurostimulation question is not a request for enthusiasm. It asks whether a candidate can say what a device does, which physical variable it manipulates, which disorders it has been tested in, and how strong that evidence actually is, and can do all four without inflating an investigational technique into an established treatment. Magnetic seizure therapy anchors this group because it has been tested against an active comparator in randomised trials, and because the shape of that evidence is itself examinable. The remaining modalities are best learned by what each one varies: the waveform of the current, the form of energy delivered, or the timing of stimulation. The procedural technique for every device named here, and the apparatus that surrounds it, is set out in the ECT and neurostimulation notes.

22.1 Magnetic seizure therapy, and the inversion that defines it

Magnetic seizure therapy uses the physics of transcranial magnetic stimulation. A rapidly changing magnetic field crosses scalp and skull without the attenuation an externally applied electrical current suffers, and induces a current in the cortex beneath. Repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation, which has its own section, uses that induced current subconvulsively: the entire discipline of the technique lies in modulating cortical excitability while staying below the point at which a seizure is provoked. Magnetic seizure therapy takes the same class of hardware and reverses the intention. It is delivered so as to produce a generalised seizure, and the seizure is the therapeutic act, exactly as it is in electroconvulsive therapy.

RULE **Magnetic seizure therapy is magnetic stimulation hardware carrying convulsive intent.** One sentence, and it is the whole definition. Repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation is delivered so as not to provoke a seizure; magnetic seizure therapy is delivered so as to provoke one. Every other feature of the modality, from where it is performed to what it is compared against, is downstream of that inversion.

Two consequences follow at once, and both are answerable without any parameter. First, magnetic seizure therapy is a convulsive treatment and therefore needs the peri-procedural support that a convulsive treatment requires, delivered in an appropriately equipped treatment

and recovery setting. That requirement places it beside electroconvulsive therapy in service terms and separates it from the subconvulsive magnetic techniques it shares hardware with, however similar the two look on a photograph. Second, for a trial testing non-inferiority and the cognitive trade-off against the established convulsive treatment, the correct comparator is electroconvulsive therapy rather than sham or a subconvulsive protocol, because the claim being tested there is not that seizures help but that this way of producing them costs the patient less. A trial asking a different question, such as whether magnetic seizure therapy has a specific effect beyond the procedure itself and expectancy, would call for a credible sham instead; the comparator follows the question. The settings that achieve the inversion, and the whole procedural apparatus around them, belong to the ECT and neurostimulation notes and are not repeated here.

22.2 Why the seizure is meant to be different, and what is actually known

The rationale is physical. An electrical current applied at the scalp must cross tissue of high resistance before it reaches the brain, and the path it takes is determined as much by that tissue as by where the operator puts it. A magnetically induced current is not attenuated in the same way, so in principle the initiating volume of cortex can be smaller and more predictable. If the seizure begins in a smaller volume, the argument runs, it may engage less of the brain, and the cognitive cost may be correspondingly lower. That hypothesis is the reason the modality exists.

What the evidence supports is narrower than the hypothesis, and the difference between the two is where marks are won. The IFCN safety consensus on transcranial magnetic stimulation records that seizures induced by magnetic seizure therapy are less robust and differ in their physiological expression from those induced by electroconvulsive therapy, and it records that on animal evidence only, not on human evidence. That is a statement about how the seizure behaves, not a statement about how far it spreads through the human brain. Human electrophysiological or imaging evidence on whether the magnetically induced seizure propagates less widely, and on how much of any observed cognitive advantage a propagation difference would explain, is not established.

TRAP **Writing focality as the established explanation for the memory difference.** It is the mechanism candidates reach for because it is tidy and because it was the design rationale. The honest position is that the animal data show the seizures differ, that the human trials show a difference on the autobiographical memory outcome they measured, and that the causal link between the two has not been demonstrated in people. An answer that states the hypothesis as hypothesis and then names the missing evidence reads as better trained than one that asserts the mechanism.

22.3 The confirmatory randomised evidence

The design is as examinable as the result. A **non-inferiority** trial sets aside the question of whether the new treatment is better. It asks whether the new treatment falls short by no more than a pre-specified margin, so that its advantages elsewhere can legitimately decide the choice. That question is the right one here, because nobody claims magnetic seizure therapy produces

more remission than electroconvulsive therapy; the claim is that it costs the patient less memory for a comparable chance of getting well.

The CREST-MST trial put that claim to a confirmatory randomised test against ultrabrief electroconvulsive therapy, on 239 randomised participants.

27.8% REMISSION, ULTRABRIEF ECT ARM	**22.5%** REMISSION, MST ARM	**17.3%** MEMORY WORSENING, ECT ARM	**2.7%** MEMORY WORSENING, MST ARM

Read the two pairs in opposite directions. On remission the gap was **5.3%** in favour of electroconvulsive therapy, and non-inferiority of magnetic seizure therapy was nonetheless established, with p=0.048 and a 95% CI -4.4 to 14.9. On worsening of **autobiographical memory** the difference ran the other way and was of a different order of magnitude, at p=0.0003. So the trial delivers precisely the trade the modality was designed to offer, and it delivers it with the remission point estimate favouring the older treatment.

TRAP **Reading non-inferiority as equivalence, or worse, as superiority.** Non-inferiority is a bounded conclusion: it says the true difference is unlikely to be worse than the margin the trial declared before it started. It does not say the two treatments produced the same remission rate, and in this trial they did not. A candidate who writes that magnetic seizure therapy matched electroconvulsive therapy on remission has misread the design; the defensible sentence names the direction of the difference and then says non-inferiority was established.

22.4 The bipolar pilot, and what a pilot can and cannot settle

The CORRECT-BD pilot asked the same question in bipolar depression and found the same pattern. Remission was reached by 6/20 (30%) in the electroconvulsive therapy group and 5/25 (20%) in the magnetic seizure therapy group, while clinically important worsening of autobiographical memory occurred in 6/27 (22.2%) against 2/28 (7.1%). Remission favoured the older treatment numerically; memory favoured the newer one.

Two features of those figures deserve attention because they are what an examiner is testing. The study randomised n=55. It was not powered for efficacy, so the remission comparison is descriptive and no inference about relative efficacy can be drawn from it. And the denominators are not the same across the two outcomes, because the participants contributing a remission judgement and those contributing a memory assessment are not the same set. Quoting a percentage from a pilot without saying that it came from a pilot is the commonest way this material is got wrong, and it is a failure of scientific reading rather than of memory.

22.5 Reading the two trials as one answer

An answer that lists both trials and stops has done half the work. The two are not two attempts at the same question; they occupy different rungs of the evidence ladder and they license different sentences. Setting them out on shared axes makes that explicit.

AXIS	CONFIRMATORY NON-INFERIORITY TRIAL	RANDOMISED PILOT IN BIPOLAR DEPRESSION
Question it was built to answer	Whether magnetic seizure therapy falls short of the active comparator by no more than the declared margin	Whether the same pattern appears in bipolar depression, and whether a definitive trial is feasible
Comparator	Ultrabrief electroconvulsive therapy	Ultrabrief electroconvulsive therapy
Direction on remission	Numerically favoured electroconvulsive therapy	Numerically favoured electroconvulsive therapy
Direction on autobiographical memory	Favoured magnetic seizure therapy	Favoured magnetic seizure therapy
What the result licenses	A conclusion of non-inferiority on remission, bounded by the confidence interval	Hypothesis generation and planning of a definitive trial
What it does not license	Any claim that magnetic seizure therapy produces more remission	Any conclusion about relative efficacy at all

GOOD TO REMEMBER

When a patient or a family asks about the memory-sparing alternative to electroconvulsive therapy, the honest account carries both halves of the result and not just the attractive one. CREST-MST found less worsening on its specified autobiographical memory measure, and the memory figures set out above are that result; it should not be widened into a claim about cognition as a whole. The chance of remission was numerically lower for magnetic seizure therapy in the confirmatory trial and in the pilot alike, and in the confirmatory trial the conclusion drawn was non-inferiority, not equality. Presenting the memory figure alone converts a defensible clinical discussion into a promise the evidence does not support.

22.6 Beyond the seizure: the transcranial electrical waveforms

The rest of the group varies something other than the intention. The transcranial electrical modalities are distinguished here by the waveform of the current applied at the scalp; their intensity, montage, electrode geometry and the resulting distribution of current in the head may also differ. Guidance on low intensity transcranial electric stimulation endorsed by ESBS and IFCN separates the family by waveform in this way.

- Transcranial direct current stimulation, which has its own section, applies a current of constant intensity and polarity.
- Transcranial alternating current stimulation, **tACS**, alternates between polarities at a steady sinusoidal frequency.
- Transcranial random noise stimulation, **tRNS**, alternates at a randomly changing frequency.

The distinction is not cosmetic, and the reasoning behind it is worth carrying. A constant current shifts the resting membrane potential of the underlying cortex in one direction and so biases the

likelihood of firing. An oscillating current can, in principle, interact with the brain's own rhythms, which makes the frequency chosen a hypothesis about which rhythm is disordered rather than an arbitrary setting. A randomly varying current makes no such frequency-specific claim; its rationale is the addition of stochastic input to a network. Three different theories of how to help a sick circuit therefore sit inside one apparently uniform family, and an answer that says so has understood the field.

What cannot be stated here is how well any of them works in any named disorder. No disorder-level efficacy figure for alternating current or random noise stimulation is available to this section, and the correct examination position is to describe the mechanism and the family structure, name the modality as investigational, and decline to attach an effect size to it.

22.7 Transcranial focused ultrasound

Focused ultrasound is the only technique in this group that changes the form of energy rather than the shape of a current. Acoustic energy can be steered so that it converges on a small volume at depth while passing through the tissue in front of it at much lower intensity, which is the property that makes it interesting: it offers a non-invasive route to targets that surface stimulation cannot reach, and it does so without an implanted device.

The point that must be got right is that the same physical technology spans two entirely different clinical acts, separated by intensity. **HIFU** used for ablation typically employs acoustic intensities **greater than 200 W/cm2**, whereas **low-intensity focused ultrasound** used for neuromodulation generally operates **below 100 W/cm2**. One destroys tissue at the focus and the change it produces is permanent; the other is intended to modulate the activity of tissue it leaves intact. A candidate who writes about focused ultrasound without naming that split has written about two procedures as though they were one, and the resulting answer cannot be corrected by adding detail, because the error is categorical.

22.8 Adaptive and closed-loop stimulation

The last variable available to an emerging modality is not where or how hard, but when. Conventional deep brain stimulation, which has its own section, runs open-loop: the device delivers what it was programmed to deliver, and the programme changes only when a clinician changes it. **Adaptive, closed-loop deep brain stimulation** senses a physiological signal from the patient and varies stimulation in response to it, so the device is titrating itself against the state of the circuit rather than against a clinic appointment. Conceptually this is the most significant shift in the group, because it moves the treatment from a fixed prescription to a feedback system.

Its regulatory position is precise and is the part most often stated wrongly. The US FDA granted adaptive deep brain stimulation as an optional programming feature on an existing deep brain stimulation system under PMA P960009 supplement S478, with a decision date recorded as 20 February 2025, and that authorisation is for Parkinson's disease. There is no corresponding authorisation for any psychiatric indication. The adaptive principle is being studied in psychiatry, but the approval that exists sits outside it.

PITFALL

Telling a patient with severe refractory illness, or a family that has read about it, that closed-loop brain stimulation is now approved and available for their condition. The approval is for Parkinson's disease. Describing a movement-disorder authorisation as though it extends to psychiatric indications raises an expectation that cannot be met and is a factual error in the record, not merely an optimistic phrasing.

22.9 Answering the emerging-modality question honestly

The group has no shared mechanism, so it needs a shared method of answering. For any device in it, the same three questions produce a structured reply, and they can be applied to a modality a candidate has never seen.

- Which physical variable does it change, and what does the change intend to do to the circuit?
- What has it been compared against, in whom, and how many were studied?
- What does the resulting evidence license as a sentence, and what does it not?

MNEMONIC

Intent, Waveform, Energy, Timing

The four axes on which the emerging modalities separate. Magnetic seizure therapy changes the intent of magnetic stimulation from subconvulsive to convulsive. Alternating current and random noise stimulation change the waveform. Focused ultrasound changes the form of energy. Adaptive stimulation changes the timing. Nothing in the list asserts an efficacy claim, which is exactly why it is safe to reproduce under examination conditions.

Applied to this material, that method gives an answer with different strengths in different places, and the differences are the substance. Magnetic seizure therapy carries randomised comparative evidence against an active treatment, in a confirmatory trial and a pilot that point the same way on remission and on memory. The electrical waveform variants and focused ultrasound neuromodulation are described here by mechanism and by physical parameter, and no disorder-level efficacy figure is attached to them, because none is available to this section. Adaptive stimulation has a regulatory position, and that position is outside psychiatry.

One further limit belongs in the answer rather than in a footnote. No regulatory classification, product licence or indication authorisation for a magnetic seizure therapy device in India could be established from the sources behind this section, nor any report of an Indian centre delivering it clinically or in research; the same absence holds for therapeutic alternating current and random noise stimulation and for focused ultrasound neuromodulation. The position that is defensible in an Indian examination and in an Indian clinic is therefore that magnetic seizure therapy is investigational and is not documented as available here, stated as an absence of evidence rather than as an assertion of unavailability.

Each emerging modality is defined by the single variable it changes, and its evidence is worth exactly what its comparator and its sample size make it worth.

23 · Theta-burst stimulation and accelerated TMS protocols (SAINT) as recent neurostimulation advances

Theta-burst is not a new machine, it is a new rhythm. Three separate innovations sit behind the phrase "recent advances in transcranial magnetic stimulation", and the popular account of the field runs them together: a change in how the pulses are patterned, a change in how the sessions are spaced across the calendar, and a change in how the cortical target is chosen. Theta-burst stimulation is the first. Accelerated protocols are the second. Imaging-based targeting is the third. The best-known protocol in this area is all three at once, which is why its headline result is quoted more often than it is understood. An answer that keeps the three axes apart, and attaches every published number to the design that produced it, will outscore one that recites remission rates.

The procedural side of all of this, including how the instrument is specified and how treatment intensity is referenced before a course begins, belongs to the ECT and neurostimulation notes and is not repeated here. What follows is the modality answer: what theta-burst is, where the accelerated schedules came from, what the trials actually demonstrated, where the two guideline positions currently sit, and what remains undocumented.

23.1 What theta-burst stimulation is

Theta-burst stimulation is a patterned form of repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation rather than a modality in its own right: instead of delivering single pulses at one even frequency, the stimulator delivers short bursts of high-frequency pulses and repeats those bursts at the **theta rhythm**. The parameters the majority of the literature has used are those originally described by Huang and colleagues, 50 Hz bursts of 3 pulses repeated at 5 Hz. The rationale is borrowed rather than invented. Burst patterning at theta frequency is the arrangement that was used in animal preparations to induce lasting change in synaptic efficacy, and the argument for importing it into human cortical stimulation is that a patterned train induces plasticity more efficiently than an evenly spaced one of comparable size. That argument is a rationale, not a demonstrated human mechanism, and the clinical case for the pattern has had to be made separately in trials.

The consequence a candidate should be able to state in one line is administrative before it is biological. Because the pulses arrive in dense bursts, a treatment session runs to roughly **3 minutes**, dramatically shorter than the conventional session it substitutes for. The parent modality and the clinical setup around it are otherwise similar, but the dose structure, the session duration and the tolerability are not identical, which is precisely why the substitution had to be tested rather than assumed.

RULE **Theta-burst changes the pattern, not the modality.** The same instrument delivers the same kind of stimulation to the same patient; what changes is how the pulses are arranged in time, and with that arrangement the dose structure, the length of the session and the tolerability of it. It follows that nothing about the parent technique is superseded, and that every therapeutic claim specific to the pattern needs its own evidence. Two forms of the pattern are used, an intermittent one and a continuous one, and the depression evidence that follows is entirely about the intermittent form.

23.2 THREE-D, and what a non-inferiority result licenses

The trial that moved intermittent theta-burst out of the physiology laboratory and into routine depression practice was **THREE-D**. In patients with **treatment-resistant depression**, intermittent theta-burst was **non-inferior** to 10 Hz repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation, with low dropout numbers and similar side-effect, safety and tolerability profiles in both arms. That sentence, and the design word inside it, is the examinable core.

The quantities matter because the argument is statistical before it is clinical. HRSD-17 scores improved from 23.5 to 13.4 in the high-frequency arm and from 23.6 to 13.4 in the theta-burst arm, an adjusted difference 0.103 with a lower 95% CI of -1.16 and p=0.0011, tested against a pre-specified non-inferiority margin set at 2.25 points. Read what that structure does: the confidence bound sits well inside the margin, so the trial excludes a loss of effect larger than the margin allows. It does not measure a gain.

Tolerability was close but not identical, and the asymmetry is worth carrying. Dropouts across the two arms were 6% and 8%, headache was the commonest adverse event in both at 64% and 65%, and pain during treatment was rated higher with theta-burst, 3.8 vs 3.4 out of a possible 10, p=0.011. A shorter session is not automatically a more comfortable one, and a patient who declines the technique on those grounds is not being unreasonable.

TRAP **Writing that this trial showed theta-burst to be better, or that it showed the two to be identical.** A non-inferiority design with a pre-specified margin can only exclude a loss larger than that margin, and the primary analysis here was per-protocol rather than intention-to-treat. The result licenses substituting the shorter protocol for the longer one on grounds of time and throughput. It does not license a claim of greater efficacy, and an absent difference is not the same finding as demonstrated equality.

23.3 The regulatory footing came before the recommendation

Theta-burst acquired a device footing before it acquired a graded guideline recommendation, and knowing the sequence explains why the technique is widely available while the formal appraisals remain unsettled. An Indian review of the evolution of transcranial magnetic stimulation services in psychiatry tabulates the regulatory record for neuropsychiatric indications, and its 2018 entry is the MagVita TMS Therapy System with TBS (Tonica Elektronik, MagVenture) for major depressive disorder, recorded as the first theta-burst entry in that table.

A regulatory entry of this kind is a statement about one named system and its labelled indication. It is not a graded appraisal of a body of evidence, and it says nothing about accelerated scheduling or about imaging-based targeting, which came later and are separately evidenced.

Candidates conflate the two because both are commonly described as approval; keeping them apart is a cheap mark.

23.4 Accelerated protocols and the Stanford protocol

"Accelerated" is a statement about the calendar, not about the pulse. An **accelerated protocol** delivers more than one session in a day so that a course which would otherwise occupy weeks is compressed into days. Three things can therefore be varied independently, and a protocol description that does not specify all three is incomplete:

- how many sessions are given in a day;
- how many days the whole course runs;
- how the cortical target is chosen for the individual patient.

The best-developed example is **Stanford Neuromodulation Therapy**, the accelerated **fMRI-targeted** intermittent theta-burst protocol previously called SAINT. Beyond the compressed schedule, its distinctive feature is the target: the region of left DLPFC most functionally anticorrelated with the **subgenual anterior cingulate cortex**, identified in the individual patient by functional imaging rather than assigned by a group rule.

In a double-blind randomised trial reported at a planned interim analysis, the protocol beat sham. The mean percent reduction in MADRS score 4 weeks after treatment was 52.5% with active treatment against 11.1% with sham, in 29 treated (14 active, 15 sham) from 32 enrolled. That denominator is the part which falls out of retelling. The report's own conclusion is that further trials are needed to determine the protocol's durability and to compare it with other treatments, so presenting it as an established treatment misstates its authors' position, not merely the evidence.

52.5% at 4 weeks	11.1% at 4 weeks	29
ACTIVE, MADRS REDUCTION	SHAM, MADRS REDUCTION	PATIENTS TREATED

GOOD TO REMEMBER

SAINT and Stanford Neuromodulation Therapy are the same protocol under two names, the newer replacing the older. A literature search or a guideline read under only one of them will miss half the record, because the trial report uses the newer name while the Indian guidance cites the older. When a referrer or a patient asks about "the Stanford protocol", they are asking about the accelerated imaging-targeted schedule, not about theta-burst patterning as such.

23.5 The remission figure, and which study produced it

The number that reaches patients and referrers is a remission rate near ninety percent, and it did not come from the randomised comparison above. The same report records a remission rate of approximately **90%** after 5 days of open-label treatment. That is a different cohort, a different design and a different outcome measure from the sham-controlled reduction in depression score, and the two quantities answer different questions.

A second figure circulates beside it. The Indian Psychiatric Society guideline on the therapeutic use of repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation records SAINT remission at **86.4%** in treatment-resistant depression, from a high-dose accelerated protocol running 10 daily sessions for 5 days guided by resting-state functional connectivity imaging, and states in the same passage that such protocols remain to be tested in controlled studies. These are two reported figures for the same open-label protocol, appearing in two documents. Print whichever your source supports, attach the source to it, and do not average or reconcile them.

TRAP **Quoting the remission rate as though the randomised trial produced it.** The controlled result is a percentage reduction in a depression rating scale against sham; the remission rate is an open-label figure from treatment without a sham comparator. Candidates merge them because both are large percentages attached to the same protocol name, and the merged sentence reads as though a sham-controlled trial delivered remission in nine patients out of ten. It did not, and the two published open-label figures do not even agree with each other.

PITFALL

Delivering the compressed schedule without the imaging step and calling it the same protocol. Both the trial report and the Indian guidance describe the protocol as functionally imaging-guided, with the target defined in the individual patient. A compressed schedule aimed by a conventional method may be a perfectly reasonable thing to study, but it is not the protocol the published remission figures came from, and those figures should not be offered for it in a consent conversation.

23.6 Where the guideline positions stand, and why they diverge

Two guideline positions can be asked for, and they do not agree. The divergence is instructive rather than embarrassing, and an answer that names it is stronger than one that smooths it.

The VA/DoD guideline for major depressive disorder declines to recommend either for or against theta-burst stimulation, recording insufficient evidence, a strength of neither for nor against, and certainty of very low. Note the shape of that entry. It is a statement about the state of the evidence base, not a finding that the technique is ineffective, and reading it as the latter is a common error.

The Indian Psychiatric Society position on accelerated protocols is cautious for a related but separate reason: a meta-analysis restricted to accelerated protocols over the left dorsolateral prefrontal cortex was not found to be associated with significant response, and the SAINT remission figure is explicitly flagged as untested in controlled studies. The caution is attached to acceleration, not to patterning.

The tension is worth stating plainly. The non-inferiority trial showed intermittent theta-burst to be non-inferior to a high-frequency protocol that the VA/DoD guideline does recommend, and yet that guideline still declines to grade theta-burst itself. Guideline appraisals grade a body of evidence for a named intervention; inheriting a recommendation across a comparison, however sound the comparison, is not how they are constructed.

SOURCE OF THE FIGURE	DESIGN THAT PRODUCED IT	WHAT IS REPORTED	WHAT IT LICENSES
The non-inferiority trial	Randomised, per-protocol primary analysis, treatment-resistant depression	Non-inferior to 10 Hz; adjusted difference 0.103 against a margin set at 2.25 points	Substitution of the shorter protocol, on time and throughput
The Stanford protocol trial	Double-blind sham-controlled, planned interim analysis, 29 treated from 32 enrolled	MADRS reduction 52.5% active against 11.1% sham, 4 weeks after treatment	An efficacy signal in a small sample; durability left open
The same report, open-label cohort	Open-label, no sham comparator	Remission approximately 90% after 5 days of treatment	Hypothesis generation only
Indian Psychiatric Society guidance	Guideline citation of the same open-label protocol	Remission 86.4% in treatment-resistant depression	The figure met in Indian reading, flagged untested in controlled studies
VA/DoD depression guideline	Formal appraisal of theta-burst as an intervention	Insufficient evidence; neither for nor against; very low certainty	No recommendation in either direction

23.7 What predicts response, and what that finding is not

The Indian guideline's depression evidence review reports a meta-analysis restricted to theta-burst studies, which identified three features predicting higher response rates:

- at least **1800 pulses per session**;
- **subthreshold intensity**;
- a treatment duration of two weeks or less.

Three cautions travel with that list, and an answer that prints the predictors without them has overstated the source. First, these are predictors recovered from a meta-analysis and reported inside an evidence narrative; they are not issued as a recommended protocol, and the guideline does not present them as one. Second, they were derived in depression, and the same review does not establish them for obsessive-compulsive disorder, schizophrenia or addiction. Third, the direction of the first predictor is easy to invert under exam pressure: the finding is a floor, more pulses in a session rather than fewer, while the duration predictor runs the other way, a shorter course rather than a longer one. How any of these is actually implemented in the treatment room belongs to the ECT and neurostimulation notes.

The accelerated-protocol meta-analysis sits beside this list and has to be reported beside it rather than folded into it. That analysis, restricted to accelerated protocols over the left dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, found no significant association with response. The theta-burst analysis above reports three features associated with higher response rates among the studies it pooled. Neither analysis compares one schedule directly against the other, so neither licenses a statement about

what acceleration adds or removes relative to a conventionally spaced course, and no direct schedule-comparison analysis was found to settle it.

23.8 Utility beyond depression, and what is not on record

Every figure above belongs to depression, and the honest answer says so. No theta-burst efficacy figure for any other disorder is carried here, and the response predictors are explicitly not established outside depression. The disorder-by-disorder indication set for conventional repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation is taught with that modality and should be answered from there rather than reconstructed under this heading; what can be said about theta-burst outside depression is that the evidence used here does not extend to it, which is a different statement from saying the technique does not work there.

The Indian footing for the accelerated protocols is undocumented rather than negative, and the distinction is worth making explicitly instead of filling in. Whether any Indian centre currently delivers an accelerated or imaging-targeted theta-burst course in clinical service, whether any Indian trial of accelerated intermittent theta-burst in depression has been conducted, what such a course costs a patient here, and whether the functional-imaging targeting step is feasible in routine services are all questions the sources behind this section do not answer. They would be answered by the national neuromodulation body and by the academic centres that run these services. Until they are, the defensible position in an answer is that this is an international recent advance whose Indian position is not on record.

IN INDIA

Where instrument time rather than referral volume is what limits how many patients finish a course, intermittent theta-burst is the throughput decision. The session is short enough that more patients can be treated on one machine in a working day, and the non-inferiority result means the substitution is not paid for in effectiveness that trial could detect. Note carefully what the Indian Psychiatric Society caution attaches to: it attaches to the accelerated, several-sessions-a-day protocols and to the imaging-targeted variant, and not to theta-burst patterning itself, which sits inside the same guideline's depression evidence review as a studied form of the parent technique. Choosing the pattern and declining the acceleration is a defensible position, but name each authority separately instead of summing them into a joint endorsement: the non-inferiority trial supports intermittent theta-burst as non-inferior to the high-frequency protocol, the Indian Psychiatric Society is cautious specifically about acceleration, and the VA/DoD guideline remains neutral on theta-burst itself, neither for nor against it.

MNEMONIC

Design, Denominator, Endpoint, Durability

Four questions to put to any accelerated-stimulation result before quoting it: was there a sham arm, how many patients were actually treated, which scale and which time point produced the figure, and has the effect been shown to last. The Stanford report answers the first three and leaves the fourth open in its own words.

Theta-burst changes the pattern and acceleration changes the calendar: every headline number in this field belongs to one design, and an answer is only as strong as the design it names beside the figure.

Pharmacogenetic and structural drug-reaction syndromes

24 · HLA-B*1502 and HLA-A*3101 testing and carbamazepine, oxcarbazepine and phenytoin severe cutaneous reactions (SJS and TEN)

This is the one prescription in psychiatry that a laboratory result is allowed to veto before the first tablet. Most pharmacogenetics adjusts a dose; here a single allele decides whether a drug is used at all. The marks sit on five questions, asked in this order: which allele, which drug, which population, when the test is worth doing, and how to read a test whose negative result is close to conclusive while its positive result is mostly a false alarm. A candidate who can only say that carbamazepine causes severe skin reactions in Asian patients has answered none of them.

Two alleles carry the topic: one is narrow in reaction and wide in drug, the other wide in reaction and narrow in drug. Three aromatic agents are implicated, and the classic error is that the substitute a candidate reaches for is one of the three. The wider family of idiosyncratic reactions, including drug reaction with eosinophilia and systemic symptoms, is taken up elsewhere in these notes.

24.1 The reaction the test exists to prevent

Stevens-Johnson syndrome and **toxic epidermal necrolysis** are one process separated by area. CPIC defines them by epidermal detachment as a proportion of body surface area, with a formally named overlap band between them, so a case is classified by extent rather than by morphology. The bands are exclusive at their edges, and detachment of exactly 10 per cent is overlap rather than Stevens-Johnson syndrome; the guideline's own prose writes the lower band loosely enough to assign that edge to both, so the strip below prints the boundary as the standard clinical classification sets it.

less than 10%	10 to 30%	more than 30%
BSA, SJS	BSA, OVERLAP	BSA, TEN

Mortality separates just as sharply as the area does. CPIC gives rates typically below 5% for Stevens-Johnson syndrome and above 30% for toxic epidermal necrolysis, with sepsis the most frequent cause of death, and adds that mortality is also related to age, the drug half-life and how early the drug is discontinued. Two of those three are fixed by the time the rash appears; only the third is in the prescriber's hands. Half-life as a pharmacokinetic principle belongs to the Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes.

The population weighting is what makes this an Indian examination topic rather than a Western one. The carbamazepine boxed warning estimates these reactions at 1 to 6 per 10,000 new users

in countries with mainly Caucasian populations, with the risk in some Asian countries about 10 times higher. For oxcarbazepine the label reports that the reporting rate of toxic epidermal necrolysis and Stevens-Johnson syndrome, itself generally accepted to be an underestimate because of underreporting, exceeds background incidence rate estimates by a factor of 3- to 10-fold.

GOOD TO REMEMBER

Because mortality tracks how early the drug is stopped, the instruction that changes the outcome is given at the first prescription, not at the first rash: stop the tablet and attend the same day if any rash appears. It costs nothing and is the one part of this topic that does not depend on a genotype being available.

24.2 Two alleles doing two different jobs

The first discrimination is between allele and phenotype. **HLA-B*15:02** is tied to one reaction and, on the original Han Chinese work, to a very large effect: an odds ratio for carbamazepine-induced Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis of 1357, with a 95% confidence interval of 193.4 to 8838.3. The same study showed the association is phenotype-specific rather than a general marker of drug allergy: HLA-B*15:02 is not associated with maculopapular exanthema or hypersensitivity syndrome, whereas HLA-A*31:01 is associated with maculopapular exanthema, at an odds ratio of 17.5 with a 95% confidence interval of 4.6 to 66.5. A later systematic review put the same point in clinical language: carriers of HLA-B*15:02 are at strongly increased risk of carbamazepine-induced Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis in populations where the allele is common, but not of carbamazepine-induced hypersensitivity syndrome or maculopapular exanthema.

HLA-A*31:01 is the mirror image. CPIC states that, unlike the other allele, it is associated with a wider range of carbamazepine hypersensitivity reactions, including maculopapular exanthema, drug reaction with eosinophilia and systemic symptoms, and Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis, in many different populations. Breadth of phenotype does not buy breadth of drug: the phenytoin guideline records that no association between HLA-A*31:01 and phenytoin-induced Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis has presently been found, despite the structural similarity between the two drugs.

RULE **Each allele names a reaction and a drug list, and neither list generalises.** One allele is narrow in phenotype and wide in drug, covering three aromatic agents for a single reaction; the other is wide in phenotype and narrow in drug, covering several reactions for carbamazepine alone. An answer that treats them as two interchangeable risk markers for the same thing has lost the structure of the topic.

24.3 Four numbers, four different questions

An odds ratio in the thousands is a statement about association, not about test performance, and the two are routinely conflated. CPIC reports that **HLA-B*15:02 as a predictive test for carbamazepine-induced Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis has estimated sensitivity 98% and specificity 97% in the Han Chinese population**. The

population qualifier is part of the number: no equivalent estimate exists for any Indian population. A provenance point travels with them: CPIC cites the 2006 Han Chinese study for those figures, but that study's abstract itself reports only the odds ratio, not sensitivity or specificity, so attribute them to the guideline rather than to the primary paper.

Sensitivity and specificity describe the test; predictive values describe the patient, and in a rare outcome they diverge violently. In the same population, the **positive predictive value** of the allele for carbamazepine-induced Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis is **7.7%** and the **negative predictive value** 100%. The allele is therefore close to necessary and nowhere near sufficient, since the great majority of carriers would never have developed the reaction. That asymmetry justifies the strategy: a test used to exclude does not need a high positive predictive value.

The same asymmetry sharpens across the two drugs. CPIC states that the positive predictive value of HLA-B*15:02 for oxcarbazepine-induced Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis is estimated at 0.73%, much lower than the 7.7% for carbamazepine-induced disease, while the negative predictive value for both nears 100% in Southeast Asian populations. Note that the guideline does not speak with one voice on that last figure: its Table 2 footnote states flatly that HLA-B*15:02 has a 100% negative predictive value for carbamazepine-induced Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis, and that its use is currently recommended to guide use of carbamazepine and oxcarbazepine only, while the narrative section quoted above stops at the word "nears". Print both as the guideline's own, and read the word "only" in the footnote as governing which drugs the test guides, not as qualifying the figure.

For the second allele the arithmetic is entirely different and is often quoted out of scope. CPIC estimates that the positive predictive value and the **number needed to test** for HLA-A*31:01, to prevent one case of all carbamazepine-induced hypersensitivity reactions combined, are most favourable in European populations, at 43% and 47 respectively. Two qualifiers travel with that pair and neither is optional: it is a European estimate, and it is most influenced by maculopapular exanthema rather than by drug reaction with eosinophilia and systemic symptoms. A positive predictive value of that size buys mostly the prevention of a benign rash.

TRAP **Carrying the carbamazepine negative predictive value across to phenytoin.** It is stated for carbamazepine, and the phenytoin guideline says the opposite in terms: a negative HLA-B*15:02 test does not eliminate the risk of phenytoin-induced Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis. Candidates generalise because the allele and the reaction are the same, and the drug is the variable they stop watching. Note too that 7.7% appears twice in this literature with different meanings: the carbamazepine positive predictive value, and the proportion of a Taiwanese cohort testing positive.

24.4 Which population, and the figures that do not agree

Population frequency decides whether testing is worth offering; it never decides how to read a result that has come back. Published figures for the same populations differ by source and, for the second allele, by what is counted, so they are set out below by source and by measure rather than as one consensus number.

SOURCE	ALLELE	POPULATION, AS THAT SOURCE NAMES IT	MEASURE AND FIGURE
CPIC carbamazepine and oxcarbazepine guideline	HLA-B*15:02	East Asian; Oceanian; South and Central Asian	Allele frequency 6.9%; 5.4%; 4.6%, the three highest
CPIC carbamazepine and oxcarbazepine guideline	HLA-B*15:02	Japanese; Korean	Frequency less than 1%; less than 2.5%
CPIC carbamazepine and oxcarbazepine guideline	HLA-B*15:02	African; African American, Middle Eastern, Caucasian, Hispanic and South American	Not observed; less than 1%
CPIC phenytoin guideline	HLA-B*15:02	East Asian and Central or South Asian; European	Allele frequency 1% to over 20%; 0 to 1%
Carbamazepine label	HLA-B*1502	South Asians, including Indians	Intermediate prevalence, averaging **2% to 4%, but higher in some groups**
Oxcarbazepine label	HLA-B*1502	India; Korea	Allele frequency up to about 6%; up to about 2%
CPIC carbamazepine and oxcarbazepine guideline	HLA-A*31:01	Caucasian; Hispanic and South American; Japanese; South Korean; South and Central Asian	Allele frequency 3%; 6%; 8%; 5%; 2%
Carbamazepine label	HLA-A*3101	Japanese, Native American, Southern Indian (for example, Tamil Nadu) and some Arabic ancestry	Expected carriage more than 15%

Three divergences in that table are examinable in their own right. The two regulatory labels disagree with each other about India, one giving an intermediate prevalence of 2% to 4% for South Asians including Indians and the other an allele frequency up to about 6% for India; both are current, so the honest answer names both rather than averaging them. The two CPIC documents describe the same populations with a single aggregate in one and a wide range in the other, so a figure must be attributed to the guideline it came from. Most importantly, the second allele's Indian figures are not comparable: the guideline reports an allele frequency in South and Central Asians, the label an expected carriage in Southern Indian ancestry. Different quantities over different groupings, so these are two measurements and are never converted into one. Note also that the guidelines write the colon in an allele name and the labels omit it; both spellings denote the same allele, and a stem may use either.

24.5 What the instruments instruct, and at what strength

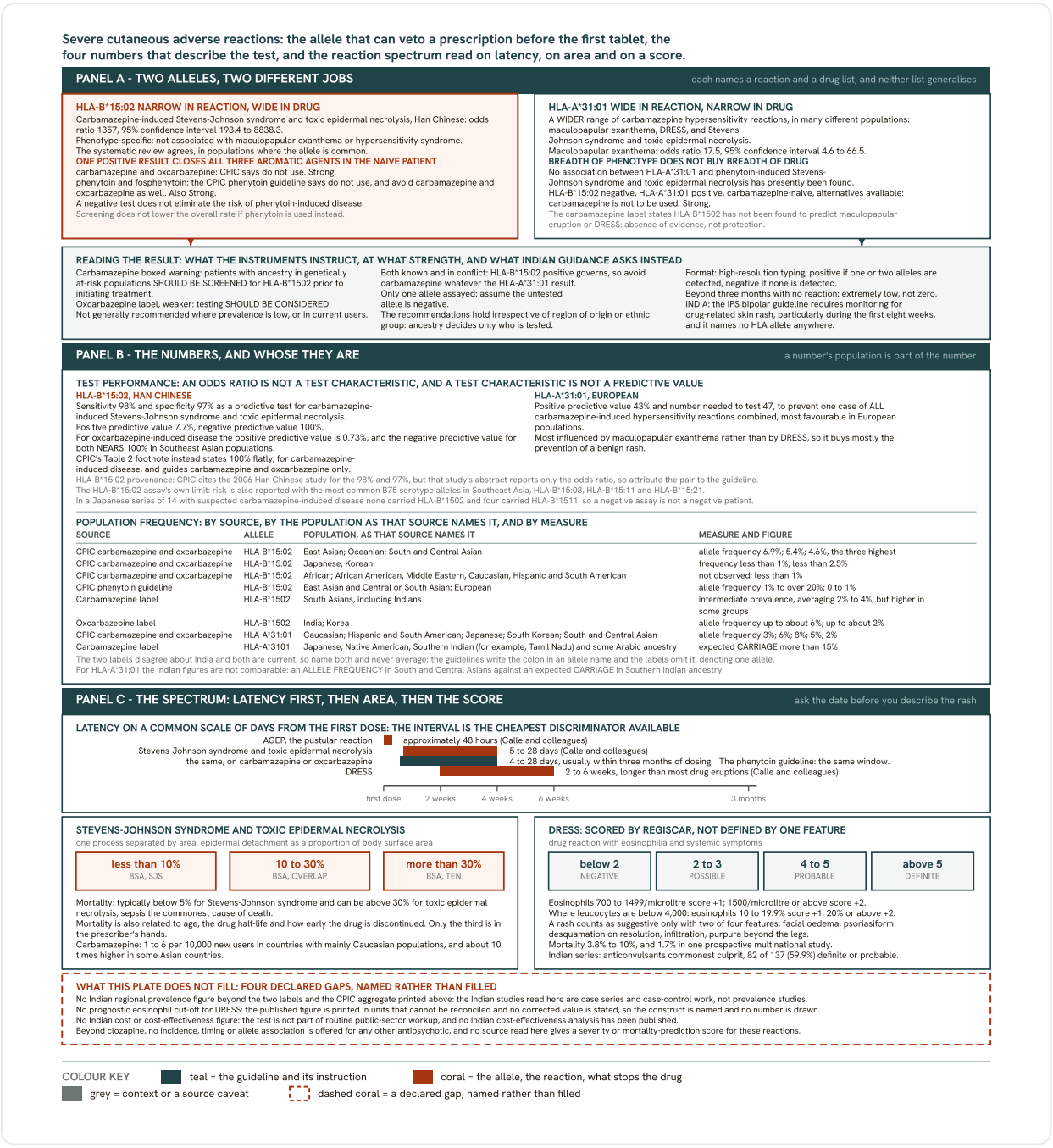


Fig 37.10 Severe cutaneous adverse reactions: allele to drug to population to test decision, then the spectrum the test exists to prevent. Two alleles do two different jobs. HLA-B*15:02 is narrow in reaction and wide in drug, carrying an odds ratio of 1357 for carbamazepine-induced Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis in Han Chinese while being not associated with maculopapular exanthema or hypersensitivity syndrome, and one positive result closes carbamazepine, oxcarbazepine and phenytoin in the naive patient at Strong classification. HLA-A*31:01 is the mirror image, wide in reaction and narrow in drug, with no association with phenytoin-induced disease presently found. The four numbers answer four different questions and each carries its population: sensitivity 98% and specificity 97%, positive predictive value 7.7% against 0.73% for oxcarbazepine-induced disease, and a negative predictive value CPIC states twice and differently, 100% in its Table 2 footnote and nears 100% in its narrative, printed here as both rather than averaged. The frequency table is set out by source and by measure because the two labels disagree about India, 2% to 4% against up to about 6%, and because an allele frequency of 2% in South and Central Asians and an expected carriage above 15% in Southern Indian ancestry are two measurements and never one. The spectrum is then read on latency first, on body surface area second and on a score third, and Indian guidance asks for rash monitoring through the first eight weeks rather than a genotype. (CPIC carbamazepine and oxcarbazepine 2018 update; CPIC phenytoin 2020 update; the FDA carbamazepine and oxcarbazepine labels; Bastuji-Garin and colleagues 1993 for the body-

surface-area bands; Hung and colleagues 2006; Amstutz and colleagues 2014; Calle and colleagues 2023; Sasidharanpillai and colleagues 2022; IPS Clinical Practice Guideline, bipolar disorder, 2025.)

Strength of wording is the substance here, and flattening the instruments into one sentence about recommended testing throws away most of the marks. The carbamazepine label carries the strongest formal mandate: its boxed warning states that patients with ancestry in genetically at-risk populations should be screened for HLA-B*1502 prior to initiating treatment. The oxcarbazepine label is deliberately weaker, stating that testing for the presence of the HLA-B*1502 allele should be considered in patients with ancestry in genetically at-risk populations, prior to initiating treatment. It fences the recommendation from both ends: screening is not generally recommended in patients from populations in which prevalence is low, or in current users.

The test format is specified rather than left open. The carbamazepine label calls for **high-resolution HLA-B*1502 typing** and defines the result binarily, positive if either one or two alleles are detected and negative if none is. There is no intermediate genotype, so heterozygosity is not a partial result and does not license a partial decision.

The guideline recommendations, read against those labels, are more decisive and are graded.

- In a carbamazepine-naive or oxcarbazepine-naive patient who is positive for the allele, CPIC states that carbamazepine and oxcarbazepine should be avoided respectively, because of the greater risk of Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis, classified Strong for both drugs.
- The phenytoin guideline extends the same logic across the class: in a phenytoin-naive patient positive for the allele, do not use phenytoin or fosphenytoin, and avoid carbamazepine and oxcarbazepine, also classified Strong.
- Where the second allele is positive and the first negative, CPIC's Table 2 states that for a carbamazepine-naive patient with alternative agents available, carbamazepine is not to be used, classified Strong.
- Where both results are known and conflict, the first allele governs: if the patient is carbamazepine-naive and positive for HLA-B*15:02, carbamazepine should be avoided regardless of the HLA-A*31:01 result.
- Where only one allele has been assayed, CPIC directs the clinician to assume the untested allele is negative rather than to treat the missing result as an unknown risk.

One further sentence disposes of the commonest abuse of this reasoning. CPIC records that these recommendations hold irrespective of the patient's region of origin or ethnic group. Ancestry decides who is offered the test; once a result exists it decides nothing further, and a positive result in a low-frequency population is still positive.

24.6 Timing: when the risk sits, and the patient already taking the drug

The risk is front-loaded, and every timing statement in this topic follows from that. CPIC states that the latency period for carbamazepine-induced or oxcarbazepine-induced Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis is short with continuous dosing and adherence to

therapy, about 4 to 28 days, with cases usually occurring within three months of dosing; the phenytoin guideline prints the same window of 4 to 28 days for phenytoin-induced disease, again with cases usually occurring within three months of dosing. The carbamazepine label puts it as a proportion: over 90% of treated patients who will experience the reaction have it within the first few months of treatment.

That front-loading makes the treatment-experienced patient a different problem. CPIC states that patients who have been continuously taking carbamazepine or oxcarbazepine for longer than three months without developing cutaneous reactions are at extremely low risk, but not zero. Read the parenthesis: the tolerant patient is reassured, not discharged from vigilance, and an answer that writes off residual risk as nil has overstated a guideline that took care not to.

PITFALL

Treating an early rash two or three weeks into carbamazepine as a nuisance to be watched. It sits inside the stated latency window, and because mortality is related to how early the drug is discontinued, the decision to observe rather than stop is itself a determinant of outcome. The opposite error is stopping a drug taken uneventfully for years on the strength of a newly reported allele.

24.7 What a negative test does not buy

A screening programme is only as good as the drug that replaces the one it prohibits. CPIC records plainly that a HLA-B*15:02 screening policy for carbamazepine will not decrease the overall rate of Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis if other anticonvulsants associated with the reaction, such as phenytoin, are used instead. The regulatory position agrees: consideration should be given to avoiding phenytoin as an alternative for carbamazepine in patients positive for HLA-B*15:02, because of the increased risk in patients of Asian ancestry.

TRAP **Substituting phenytoin for carbamazepine in a carrier.** It is the substitution a candidate reaches for first, and it is the wrong answer to write. One positive result rules out all three aromatic agents in the naive patient, and a screening policy that diverts patients from one to another prevents nothing.

Nor is the wider class clean. CPIC names **aromatic anticonvulsants** including eslicarbazepine, lamotrigine, phenytoin, fosphenytoin and phenobarbital as having very limited evidence, if any, linking them to Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis through this allele, and states that caution should still be used when choosing an alternative agent. Cross-reactivity is also clinical rather than purely genetic: the carbamazepine label tells prescribers to inform patients that **about a third of those who have had hypersensitivity reactions to carbamazepine also experience hypersensitivity reactions with oxcarbazepine**.

The last limitation is in the assay itself. CPIC records that, in addition to the tested allele, risk for carbamazepine-induced Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis has been reported in association with the most common B75 serotype alleles in Southeast Asia, HLA-B*15:08, HLA-B*15:11 and HLA-B*15:21. A Japanese series makes the consequence concrete:

among 14 patients with suspected carbamazepine-induced disease, none carried HLA-B*1502 and four carried HLA-B*1511. That is a case-series proportion without controls rather than a risk estimate, but it shows how a single-allele assay can return negative in a susceptible patient.

24.8 The Indian evidence base, and what Indian guidance actually says

One prospective study turned screening into policy anywhere. In the Taiwanese screening cohort, 7.7% tested positive and were advised not to take carbamazepine, being given an alternative or continuing their prestudy medication, while the 92.3% who tested negative were advised to take it; no Stevens-Johnson syndrome or toxic epidermal necrolysis developed in the screened-negative subjects receiving carbamazepine, against approximately 10 cases expected from the estimated historical incidence. The caveats should be stated: the comparison is against historical controls, and the expected cases are counted among study subjects rather than among the negatives who took the drug. There is no Indian equivalent of that trial.

What India has instead is three small studies, and their limits are the point. The foundational series found the allele in six of eight Indian patients with carbamazepine-induced Stevens-Johnson syndrome. A North Indian case-control study found the allele in 2 of 9 (22.2%) carbamazepine cases and in none of 37 carbamazepine-tolerant controls, p equal to 0.035, and in none of the 8 phenytoin cases. A South Indian study concluded that the association of the allele with phenytoin-induced Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis is rare in the population studied, with small sample size acknowledged as its limitation. None is a prevalence study, and none supports a statement about how common the allele is in any Indian region. A systematic review places India inside the affected geography: allele-positive patients with carbamazepine-induced disease have been reported from Asian countries only, including China, Thailand, Malaysia and India.

IN INDIA

Indian ancestry sits inside the at-risk group the carbamazepine boxed warning names, so a genotype before the first tablet is the decision this evidence supports in a carbamazepine-naive or oxcarbazepine-naive patient. Where only one allele has been assayed, the guideline instruction is to treat the untested allele as negative and act on the result you have. A positive result closes off phenytoin as the substitute as well, which is the part most likely to be missed wherever phenytoin is the default second choice. Where no genotype can be obtained, the eight-week rash watch below is what remains, and it is not a formality.

Indian guidance has not followed the pharmacogenetic route. The Indian Psychiatric Society bipolar guideline states that patients taking carbamazepine must be monitored for drug-related skin rash, particularly during the first eight weeks of therapy, as the treatment is associated with life-threatening rashes, and it names no HLA allele anywhere. Its answer to this risk is clinical vigilance over a defined window rather than genotyping. The corresponding position in the schizophrenia guideline is equally cautious in general terms, holding that the clinical utility of psychopharmacogenomics is disputable because of the lack of larger standardised trials and cost-effectiveness evaluations. A candidate asked what Indian guidance requires should answer the

rash watch, and should not attribute a genotyping mandate to a document that does not contain one.

MNEMONIC

Allele, Agent, Ancestry, Already taken

The four questions that settle a stem: which allele is tested, which aromatic agent is being started, whether ancestry places the patient in the at-risk group the label names, and whether they are naive or have taken the drug uneventfully beyond three months. The fourth changes the answer more often than candidates expect.

A negative result narrows the risk and never abolishes it; a positive result forbids all three aromatic agents in the naive patient, whatever their ancestry.

25 · DRESS syndrome and other severe idiosyncratic reactions to anticonvulsants and antipsychotics

Most drug rashes declare themselves within a fortnight. DRESS often does not, and that single property is what makes it dangerous at the bedside and reliable in an examination. **DRESS**, drug reaction with eosinophilia and systemic symptoms, begins weeks after a drug was started, damages organs as readily as skin, and in Indian series is caused mostly by agents that sit on a psychiatric prescription. The marks are in three places: the time course that shifts the differential towards DRESS and away from the other severe cutaneous reactions, the scoring system an examiner will name and expect reproduced as reasoning rather than as a form, and the culprit drugs. Candidates lose them by quoting a diagnostic band as though it were a prognostic one, by carrying a figure out of the population it was measured in, and by waiting for a rash before believing the diagnosis.

The allele-testing framework and the severe cutaneous reaction spectrum in its own right are taught separately in these notes, and carbamazepine's own pharmacology belongs to the Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes. What follows is the reaction itself: how it announces itself, how it is scored, which drugs produce it, and what can and cannot be said once the drug has been stopped.

25.1 The latency that names the syndrome

Calle and colleagues, in their World Allergy Organization Journal review, state that in most patients the reaction occurs **2 to 6 weeks** after the drug is started, a latency period longer than that of most drug eruptions. That property does a great deal of the diagnostic work before any morphology is described. A febrile eruption on the third afternoon of a new drug is usually something else; a febrile eruption in the second month, when the prescription has stopped feeling new and the drug chart has stopped being re-read, is the one that gets attributed to sepsis, to a viral illness, or to the psychiatric disorder itself.

The same review supplies the contrast that makes this examinable. Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis run a shorter course from exposure, 5 to 28 days, and the pustular reaction **AGEP** shorter still, at approximately 48 hours. Latency shifts the differential but does not separate these three reactions by itself: the Stevens-Johnson window runs out to 28 days while the DRESS window opens at two weeks, so the two overlap for a fortnight, and morphology, mucosal involvement, systemic findings and investigations remain necessary. It is still the reason the first question in a suspected drug reaction is a date and not a description.

RULE **Establish when the drug was started before you characterise the rash.** Morphology overlaps across the severe cutaneous reactions and is read differently by different observers, whereas the interval between the first dose and the first symptom is a fixed number that the patient or the file can supply. In a syndrome whose whole difficulty is that nobody suspects a drug started six weeks ago, the interval is the cheapest discriminator available.

25.2 How common it is, and how badly it ends

Every published incidence figure for this syndrome carries a different denominator, and the three in common circulation are not interchangeable.

more than 1 per 10,000	0.9 per 100,000	2.18 to 40 per 100,000
MEDICATION EXPOSURES	INHABITANTS	INPATIENTS

Read these as estimates answering three different questions, not as one rate quoted three ways. An exposure denominator asks how risky a prescription is; a population denominator asks how much of this a health system will see; an inpatient denominator is enriched for polypharmacy, for severity and for the surveillance that produces a diagnosis at all, which is why its upper end sits far above the population figure. A syndrome that is under-recognised is also under-counted, so each estimate may be shifted by how reliably the diagnosis is made and recorded in the setting it was measured in, and none of the three is a clean measurement of risk.

Mortality is reported by the same group as 3.8% to 10% despite treatment, with 1.7% in one prospective multinational study. A single figure is therefore hard to defend: the prospective cohort and the pooled literature are not measuring the same population, and an answer that quotes only the low end understates a syndrome that kills, while one that quotes only the high end inflates it. Give the spread and attribute each end.

What cannot be offered here is a prognostic laboratory threshold. The eosinophil count said to mark a poor outcome is printed in the source literature in units that cannot be reconciled with the quantity they describe, and no corrected value is stated anywhere in that paper. Reconstructing the intended number would be an invention. Substituting the diagnostic eosinophil band described below would be worse, because a cut-off built to classify a case was never validated to predict its outcome.

RULE **A diagnostic threshold is not a prognostic threshold.** The two are derived from different questions on different samples. Where a prognostic cut-off is genuinely unavailable, the correct answer names the construct and says the number is not established, and prognosis is then discussed through mortality and through the pattern of organ involvement rather than through a laboratory line that does not exist.

25.3 The phenotype, and the warning that precedes the rash

The FDA-approved label for carbamazepine describes the reaction as presenting, typically though not exclusively, with fever, rash, lymphadenopathy and/or facial swelling in association with involvement of other organ systems, with eosinophilia often present. Four points in that sentence repay attention: fever is part of the syndrome and not an incidental infection; facial swelling is a positive feature rather than a variant of urticaria; the organ involvement is the reason the syndrome is severe; and the phrase "not exclusively" is the label refusing to make any single feature necessary.

The same label carries the warning that changes practice, which is that the early manifestations of hypersensitivity can be present before any rash is evident. A patient on a recently started anticonvulsant with unexplained fever and lymphadenopathy is already inside the differential. Waiting for skin before considering the drug converts a recognisable prodrome into a multiorgan presentation.

One negative statement from the same label needs teaching exactly as written. It states that the HLA-B*1502 allele has not been found to predict the risk of less severe cutaneous reactions such as maculopapular eruption, nor to predict DRESS. That is an absence of demonstrated predictive value, not a demonstration that carriers are protected: it means the allele cannot be used to anticipate this syndrome, and equally that a negative result cannot be used to dismiss it. Allele testing in its own right, with its indications and its operating characteristics, is taught elsewhere in these notes.

25.4 Scoring it: RegiSCAR as an examination construct

The **Bocquet criteria** came first and were simple enough to memorise: a drug rash, a haematological abnormality in the form of eosinophilia or atypical lymphocytes, either of which satisfies that element, and systemic manifestations. They define the syndrome but stop short of grading confidence in it. **RegiSCAR** was built to fill that gap. RegiSCAR sorts a suspected case by total score into four bands: **below 2 negative, 2 to 3 possible, 4 to 5 probable, and above 5 definite**. The examination point is that the instrument returns a level of certainty rather than a yes or a no, so a case can be reported as probable and treated as real.

Three of its parameters are worth knowing in detail because each is defined more tightly than candidates assume. Eosinophilia is scored in two bands, the higher scoring double: eosinophils 700 to 1499/microlitre earns one point and **1500/microlitre or above** earns two. Because a septic or marrow-suppressed patient may have a low total count, there is a percentage route as well: where leucocytes are below 4,000, eosinophils of 10 to 19.9% earn one point and 20% or above earn two. Lymphadenopathy is scored only when it clears a size and a site threshold,

namely nodes of more than 1 cm affecting two anatomical regions, which is why a single palpable cervical node adds nothing.

The rash parameter is the one most often misquoted. A rash counts as suggestive of the syndrome only when it carries at least two of four specified features: facial oedema, resolution with psoriasiform desquamation, infiltrated skin lesions, and purpuric lesions involving areas other than the legs.

MNEMONIC

FIPP: Facial oedema, Infiltrated lesions, Purpura beyond the legs, Psoriasiform desquamation on resolution

Two of these four are what turns a nonspecific exanthem into a rash the scoring system will accept as suggestive. The last is retrospective, which is a useful reminder that some of the score can only be completed as the patient recovers.

A further point is available for the exclusion of alternative causes. The footnote to the Indian scoring table adds one point if at least three of four listed tests were performed and found negative, the four being:

- antinuclear antibody
- hepatitis A, B and C
- infection due to Mycoplasma or Chlamydia
- blood culture

TRAP **Quoting the exclusion-of-alternatives item as though one agreed list existed.** The Indian paper's footnote enumerates the four investigations above. The World Allergy Organization Journal review states the same item differently and does not enumerate the same set. Neither wording is an error and they must not be blended into a single averaged list. Name the source you are quoting, and if the stem does not specify one, say that published versions of the item differ.

25.5 RegiSCAR against the Japanese criteria

The competing construct is **DiHS**, drug-induced hypersensitivity syndrome, for which the Japanese consensus group laid down seven mandatory features, one of them reactivation of HHV-6. Because that assay is unavailable in many centres, the same group proposed a modification with five essential features for atypical DiHS. The two systems are not two names for one thing, and the difference is examined through the parameters they treat as mandatory.

PARAMETER	REGISCAR	JAPANESE DIHS CRITERIA
Fever	No positive points; its absence instead scores one negative point	Mandatory for typical and atypical disease
Maculopapular rash	No positive points as one of the three features mandatory for DiHS	Mandatory for typical and atypical disease
Persistence of symptoms after the drug is stopped	No positive points	Mandatory for typical and atypical disease
Early resolution	No positive points, and resolution before 15 days scores one negative point	Not specified in the sources drawn on here
Viral reactivation	Not among the parameters described here	Reactivation of HHV-6 is one of the seven mandatory features; a five-feature version exists where testing is unavailable
Yield in an Indian tertiary centre, severe reactions	57 of 58 (98.3%) classified as definite or probable	32 of 58 (55.2%) classified as atypical DiHS

Two readings of that comparison are needed. First, Sasidharanpillai and colleagues make the statement about the three DiHS-mandatory parameters narrowly, and it should be read narrowly: it says those three earn no positive points as the mandatory triad, not that RegiSCAR never scores a rash at all. Second, the difference in yield in that Indian series was statistically significant at P less than 0.001, so the choice of instrument changes how many severe reactions are captured as cases, which matters for pharmacovigilance reporting as much as for the individual patient.

TRAP **Treating fever as a scoring point in RegiSCAR.** Fever is mandatory in the Japanese criteria and earns nothing positive in RegiSCAR, where its absence subtracts instead. A candidate who has memorised one system and answers a question set on the other will score the same patient two different ways and defend the wrong one. Say which instrument you are using in the first line of the answer.

25.6 The culprit drugs a psychiatrist actually prescribes

In the Indian tertiary-centre series, anticonvulsants were the commonest culprit class by a wide margin, accounting for 82 of 137 (59.9%) cases of definite or probable disease and 36 of 53 (67.9%) of the definite cases. That profile lands squarely on the mood-stabiliser prescription.

IN INDIA

In a patient presenting with fever, an eruption and deranged organ function, work the anticonvulsant column of the drug chart first rather than last, and interrogate everything started in the preceding weeks rather than only the most recent addition. In the Indian series above, the anticonvulsants supplied the majority of definite and probable cases, and the latency reported by Calle and colleagues means the offending drug will often have been started several weeks earlier, commonly within the preceding 2 to 6 weeks, at a point where both patient and clinician have stopped regarding it as new.

Lamotrigine is the agent whose risk a psychiatrist is most often asked to quantify. Its label reports serious rashes, including Stevens-Johnson syndrome, at approximately 0.3% to 0.8% in paediatric patients aged 2 to 17 years and 0.08% to 0.3% in adults. The timing follows the pattern of this whole section: nearly all life-threatening rashes have occurred within 2 to 8 weeks of treatment initiation, with isolated cases after prolonged treatment, for example at 6 months. Note that this window is drawn from a different source and a different endpoint than the general latency quoted earlier, so the two figures should be attributed rather than merged.

The interaction that matters most in bipolar practice is with valproate. In paediatric epilepsy trials, serious rash affected 1.2% (6 of 482) of children taking concomitant valproate against 0.6% (6 of 952) not taking it. The label also lists the presence of the HLA-B*1502 allele among the rash risk factors in its boxed warning, and reports that retrospective case-control studies in patients of certain Asian ancestry suggest an approximately 2 to 3 times higher risk of Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis in carriers using lamotrigine. Lamotrigine is therefore not a self-evidently safe substitute in a carrier, and an answer that offers it as one should say which source it is following.

PITFALL

Quoting the valproate figures above when counselling an adult with bipolar disorder about a lamotrigine and valproate combination. Both come from paediatric epilepsy trials in children on multidrug regimens. No bipolar-population figure for that combination is offered here, and the honest counselling position is that the risk is real and quantified only in a different population.

25.7 Beyond DRESS: the other severe idiosyncratic reactions

Carbamazepine carries a second idiosyncratic reaction of boxed-warning severity that is haematological rather than cutaneous. Its label puts the risk of aplastic anaemia and **agranulocytosis** at **5 to 8 times** that of the general population, while noting that the untreated general-population risk is low, at approximately 6 patients per million population per year for agranulocytosis and 2 patients per million population per year for aplastic anaemia. Both halves of that warning must be taught together. A multiplier of that size applied to a base of that size still produces a rare event, which is why the reaction is not a reason to withhold the drug, and why the monitoring that accompanies it is justified by severity rather than by frequency.

The same label also describes a cutaneous pattern that is neither DRESS nor Stevens-Johnson syndrome. A fixed drug eruption presents as single or multiple circumscribed patches recurring at the same site with each exposure, and with repeated exposure the lesions may progress to a **generalised bullous fixed drug eruption**, a serious reaction that may resemble Stevens-Johnson syndrome or toxic epidermal necrolysis. The teaching value is the recurrence at a fixed site, a feature no other reaction in this group shares and one that is available from the history alone.

25.8 Clozapine, and the limits of the antipsychotic evidence

The antipsychotic side of this topic is smaller than it looks. A screen of the European pharmacovigilance database identified 51 probable or definite cases among 75,190 clozapine-treated patients with reports, with a median of 25 days between clozapine initiation and symptom onset and 3.9% ending fatally. A separate systematic review of the published literature found 26 reports covering 27 patients meeting RegiSCAR criteria, which is a collection of published cases and not an incidence cohort.

Those denominators must not be converted into a rate. A pharmacovigilance database counts reports, not patients at risk, and its denominator is the population for whom some report exists rather than the population exposed. Dividing the case count by that denominator produces a number that looks like an incidence and is not one, and because both the cases counted and the population reported on are shaped by who files a report, there is no defensible direction in which to correct it. Read the two studies for what they do establish: the reaction occurs on clozapine, the median interval from initiation to symptom onset in that pharmacovigilance series was 25 days, and a small proportion of reported cases die.

Beyond clozapine, the evidence assembled here stops. No incidence, timing or genetic-association data are offered for the other antipsychotics, and no allele association is stated for clozapine-induced blood dyscrasias or for clozapine-related DRESS. That is a limit of the sources and not a statement that the risk is absent, so the class-level generalisation is precisely what a careful answer refuses to make. The clozapine plasma level, its target range and the haematological monitoring schedule are taught separately under therapeutic drug monitoring, and the resistance decision that put the patient on clozapine is a separate question again.

25.9 After the reaction: confirming the culprit

Where several drugs were started together, the suspected culprit is identified at the bedside during the illness, and testing after recovery refines that attribution rather than making it for the first time. What follows the suspicion acutely is one step, and only one, that this chapter can source: the same authors who set the patch-testing interval, reviewing the French treatment algorithm, place interruption of the suspected drug inside the treatment of even the least severe scenario, alongside topical corticosteroids, emollients and antihistamines, and they describe the rash and the organ damage as resolving gradually after the involved drug is stopped. Withdrawal is therefore an acute treatment step and not something deferred until attribution is confirmed. Everything else about treatment stays untaught here: no corticosteroid indication, dose, route or taper, no second-line immunosuppressant, and no rule for what to do when several drugs remain

equally plausible. Calle and colleagues also state that **patch testing** should be performed 4 to 6 weeks after the reaction, with the patient off immunosuppressive therapy or systemic corticosteroids for at least 4 weeks, in order to reduce false negative results. The washout requirement is itself informative: it is a reminder that many of these patients will have been treated with systemic corticosteroids, and that testing them too early answers a question about their immunosuppression rather than about their drug.

GOOD TO REMEMBER

Do not send the patient for culprit testing at the discharge visit. Testing performed inside the washout period reads negative for the wrong reason, and a false negative here is more harmful than no test at all, because it returns the patient to a drug that nearly killed them with a piece of paper saying it did not. Book the test after the interval and after the steroids have stopped, and record the suspected drug in the chart in the meantime.

One Indian contribution is worth knowing as depth rather than as standard practice. A prospective Indian validation study of the **CET score** as a bedside screen reported that, at a cut-off above 2.12, it achieved sensitivity 94.3%, specificity 60%, positive predictive value 80.5% and negative predictive value 85.7%, against a median diagnostic delay using RegiSCAR of around 14.5 hours. Read those operating characteristics correctly: high sensitivity with modest specificity is the signature of a screening instrument, so it is a tool for deciding whom to work up quickly, not a replacement for the scoring system that classifies the case.

Fever with eosinophilia and deranged organ function weeks after a new anticonvulsant is DRESS until another cause is proven, and the rash may not have arrived yet.

Consolidate and apply

26 · Worked vignettes

A vignette in this territory is never really about the drug; it is about what changed around the drug. Stems that carry marks here rarely open with an undiagnosed patient. They open with someone already on treatment, then introduce one further fact: a second prescription, a failing organ, a pregnancy, an inherited metabolic capacity, a concentration somebody has measured, a trial that did not work, or a syndrome the treatment itself produced. That further fact is the **second variable**, and the examination value of the stem lies entirely in whether the candidate reasons from it or reads past it. This closing section introduces no new agent and no new class; it rehearses the reasoning assembled across this chapter as a reading skill, working each stem from the second variable inwards.

The discipline that earns marks is refusing to answer with a treatment algorithm. A patient who destabilised after a physician added something is not asking which antidepressant treats depression; it is asking which clearance pathway two drugs share. A patient whose measured concentration comes back low is not asking whether the drug works; it is asking whether it was

taken, whether the sample means anything, and what a low value does to the claim that the illness is resistant. Where a stem genuinely turns on class pharmacology itself, the receptor logic behind an adverse-effect signature or a choice within a single class, that reasoning belongs to the Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes. What this chapter supplies is the layer sitting above those decisions.

26.1 Four questions locate the second variable

Before deciding what a stem is asking, run the same four questions across it. Between them they cover almost every way an examiner can complicate an ordinary prescription inside one paragraph, and each opens onto a different section of this chapter.

Company	Organ	Genome	Sequence
WHAT ELSE IS ON BOARD	WHAT IS CLEARING IT	WHAT THE PATIENT BROUGHT	WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

Company asks what else the patient is taking, including everything no psychiatrist prescribed: the physician's additions, the over-the-counter purchase, the traditional remedy, tobacco. Organ asks which tissue transforms and excretes this agent, and whether it is currently doing that work. Genome asks what metabolic capacity and what risk alleles the patient brought into the room. Sequence asks what has already been given, at what exposure, for how long, with what adherence, and what it produced. The fact a stem plants to make one of the four decisive is its discriminator, and a well-built stem carries exactly one.

RULE **The prescription is the setting; the second variable is the question.** If your answer can be written without naming the interaction, the organ, the allele, the measured concentration or the failed sequence, you have answered a question about the diagnosis rather than the one the stem asked. The diagnosis here is usually scenery: it tells you which class the patient is on and nothing more. The marks sit in naming the second variable, stating the mechanism by which it acts on this prescription, and choosing the move that addresses that mechanism.

26.2 The vignette that resolves on another drug

The commonest stem describes a patient stable for a long time who is not stable now, while the psychiatric prescription is unchanged. Somebody else changed something. The reading move is to date the deterioration against the whole medication list rather than the psychiatric part of it, then ask by what route the new agent could reach the old one. The routes behave differently. A **pharmacokinetic interaction** changes how much drug is present, by altering absorption, protein binding, metabolism or renal handling, and the picture is that of too much or too little of an agent whose dose nobody touched. A **pharmacodynamic interaction** changes what a drug does rather than how much of it is there, most often by two agents acting additively on one physiological endpoint; the concentration need not move for the interaction to be real, and one pair of drugs can sit on both axes at once.

Candidates instinctively look for the enzyme, and enzymes do account for many of these stems, but the interaction matrix this chapter develops is deliberately not closed at the cytochrome axis. Drugs also compete for renal excretion, alter the sodium handling that decides how much of a

renally cleared agent is retained, displace one another from plasma protein, and add their effects at a shared receptor or a shared electrophysiological target with no enzyme involved. A stem placing a diuretic, an anti-inflammatory or an antihypertensive beside a psychotropic is usually testing that non-enzymatic axis, and a candidate hunting for a cytochrome substrate will not find one. The agent-by-agent matrix is set out in this chapter's interaction section; what the vignette wants first is the route, named correctly.

GOOD TO REMEMBER

Ask the question a psychiatric review rarely asks: what did somebody else start or stop, and when. Take the physician's list, the surgical discharge summary, the over-the-counter purchases and the herbal preparations, and lay the onset of the new problem against them. Ask about tobacco too, because moving a patient onto a smoke-free ward alters an inducing exposure without a single prescription being rewritten. Anything lining up in time with a change outside the psychiatric list is an interaction until it has been reasoned away.

26.3 The vignette that resolves on an organ

A second family holds the drug list constant and changes the patient. The physiology has moved: renal function has fallen with age or with intercurrent illness, the liver is cirrhotic, cardiac output is poor, or a neurological disorder has altered the tissue the drug acts on. The reading move is to ask which organ this agent depends on, then whether the stem has quietly told you that organ is compromised. **Renal elimination** and **hepatic biotransformation** are not interchangeable answers: an agent excreted essentially unchanged behaves quite differently in kidney disease from one extensively metabolised first, and the two failures call for different adjustments.

The recurring organ stems are cardiac, hepatic and neurological. The cardiac stem asks not only whether an agent is tolerated in heart disease but what it does to conduction and to the metabolic profile that helped produce the disease, and this chapter's monitoring section carries both halves. The hepatic stem asks about reduced clearance, and about sedation a compromised liver tolerates poorly. The neurological stem is subtlest: whether the psychotropic makes convulsions more likely, whether it worsens the movement disorder already being treated, or whether the antiparkinsonian medicine and the antipsychotic are pulling in opposite directions at one transmitter system. The vignette's job is to make the candidate notice that the organ, not the diagnosis, decides the answer.

26.4 The vignette that resolves on a measured concentration

A number in a stem is an invitation to interrogate it, not to recite a range against it. When a stem supplies a plasma concentration, the testable content is what that value means, and its meaning depends on when the sample was taken relative to the dose and to steady state, on which assay produced it, and on the patient's adherence beforehand. A value drawn before the concentration has plateaued is a point on a rising curve, not the patient's exposure. A value drawn at the wrong point in the dosing interval is not comparable with a range derived from a standard sampling time. The ranges, the sampling times and the monitoring schedules are taught in this

chapter's therapeutic drug monitoring section, and a vignette answer reasons against them rather than reproducing them.

The payoff arrives when the value is low. A low concentration in a patient who is not improving has competing explanations: the dose is genuinely too small, the drug is being cleared faster than expected because of an interaction or an inherited phenotype, or the patient is not taking it. Helping to investigate **covert non-adherence** against true pharmacological failure is one of the things a concentration does better than clinical judgement alone, which is why a level belongs in the assessment of apparent resistance before the sequence is escalated. It does not settle the question by itself. A value of zero establishes only that the drug has not been taken recently, and a value above zero is compatible with erratic taking, with full adherence, and with long-standing non-adherence disguised by a few recent doses. What turns a level into an answer is the timing of the last dose against the draw, the dose history, the interacting agents and, where doubt persists, a repeated sample. A high value in a patient who looks well matters too: the margin has narrowed, and the next intercurrent illness will be less forgiving of it.

PITFALL

Acting on a concentration without recording when the previous dose was swallowed. The result travels through the notes as a bare number, and by the time somebody decides, nobody can say whether the sample sat near the peak or near the trough, or whether the patient had been taking the drug at all beforehand. The dose then moves on a value that never described the patient's exposure. Write the time of the last dose and the time of the draw on the request form, and treat a result carrying neither as uninterpretable rather than reassuring.

26.5 The vignette that resolves on the genome

A third family plants an inherited fact. Sometimes it is explicit, a reported metaboliser status or an ancestry; more often implicit, in a patient with marked adverse effects at an ordinary dose, or no effect at a dose that suits most people, or a severe rash soon after an anticonvulsant was started. The reading move is to separate two quite different genetic questions that examinations like to set side by side. A **metaboliser phenotype** is a quantitative statement about clearance: it predicts the exposure a standard dose will produce, and the answer it drives is an adjustment of dose or a move to an agent independent of that pathway. A **risk allele** for a severe cutaneous or systemic reaction is not quantitative at all: it predicts a categorical hazard no dose adjustment addresses, so the decision it drives is whether to prescribe that drug at all.

The discrimination follows from that difference. Testing a metaboliser phenotype is informative mostly after an unexpected response, or before an agent with a narrow margin whose clearance that pathway dominates. Testing a risk allele is informative before the first exposure, in populations where the allele is common enough for the result to change practice, and its worth depends on the balance between how many affected patients it catches and how many unaffected patients it labels. This chapter's pharmacogenomics section teaches the enzymes and their application; the allele testing framework, the drugs it covers and the severe reaction spectrum sit in their own section beside it.

26.6 The vignette that resolves on a failed sequence

The resistance stem gives a history rather than a moment: a list of agents tried, with doses and durations, and a patient still unwell. Candidates rush to the next drug. The mark is in auditing the sequence first. Before an illness is called resistant, each previous trial has to be examined for whether the dose reached an adequate exposure, whether it ran long enough for a response to be judged, whether the patient actually took it, and whether the diagnosis and any maintaining physical or substance-related factor were right. A sequence failing those tests is **pseudoresistance**, and treating it as true resistance escalates a patient who has not yet had one adequate trial. This is where the measured concentration and the resistance assessment meet: a subtherapeutic level inside a supposedly failed trial reclassifies that trial instead of confirming it.

Once the sequence is genuinely adequate, the options are structurally distinct rather than a menu of equals. Switching replaces the agent; combination runs a second agent of the same class alongside the first; augmentation adds an agent from outside that class, which works through a different mechanism while the original treatment continues unchanged. The distinction turns on the class the added agent comes from, not on whether that agent has a therapeutic role of its own in the disorder being treated, because several of the standard augmenting agents do. The definitions of resistance, the staging models, how many failed trials each requires and the comparative evidence for each strategy are developed in this chapter's resistance and augmentation sections. For most of the modalities positioned against resistance, the decision moves to the device-based treatments once the drug sequence has been exhausted, and their indications and utility across disorders are taught in full in this chapter; the procedural technique for each is set out in the ECT and neurostimulation notes. Electroconvulsive therapy may enter earlier, because it is not positioned behind an exhausted drug list where a rapid or definitive response is required, and a candidate who makes it wait for one has misread the indication; the indication itself, with the body that states it, sits in this chapter's ECT section.

TRAP **Calling an illness resistant on the strength of a drug list.** Candidates read a stem containing several agent names and answer with the resistance pathway, because a long list looks like evidence. It is not evidence until every entry has been audited for adequacy of dose, adequacy of duration, adherence and diagnostic accuracy. Examiners write those failures into the stem deliberately, most often as a dose that never rose, a trial abandoned early, or a patient who quietly stopped.

26.7 The vignette that resolves on a syndrome the prescription produced

The next family reverses the direction of reasoning. The stem describes a syndrome and expects the candidate to read it backwards to the prescription that produced it. A febrile, rigid, confused patient on psychotropic medication is an urgent diagnostic and pharmacological problem at once: review the prescription immediately, asking which agents on this list act on which transmitter system, what was added or increased recently, and which of the drug-induced syndromes that combination makes possible, while the competing medical causes are evaluated alongside. The drug chart narrows the field faster than anything else available at the bedside, but it does not license deferring the search for sepsis, for central nervous system disease or for a

severe catatonic state, and this chapter's syndrome sections treat the exclusion of those competing causes as part of making the diagnosis rather than as an afterthought to it. The **iatrogenic phenocopy** is the trap in both directions, because a drug-induced syndrome can be mistaken for deterioration of the illness and deterioration of the illness for toxicity, and the discriminating information comes from the drug history, the tempo of onset and a directed neuromuscular examination taken together, with no single axis decisive on its own. What cannot separate them is whatever the two pictures hold in common, however unwell the patient looks.

The decisions that follow are pharmacological. The first is what to stop. Where the syndrome is severe, where several agents are acting additively, or where the diagnosis is still unresolved between two drug-induced syndromes, every plausible causative agent is withheld rather than one culprit chosen and the rest left running; the list is narrowed afterwards, and only where narrowing it is clinically safe. Naming the agent that most plausibly drove the syndrome still earns the mark, but it is an account of the mechanism, not a licence to continue the others. The second is the **rechallenge decision**: whether the same agent can be reintroduced, whether another member of the class is a safer destination, and what is monitored afterwards. Those judgements, with the precipitant combinations, the mechanism, the named criteria sets as examination constructs and the pharmacological management, are taught in this chapter's sections on the individual syndromes and on their comparative differentiation. The emergency-department presentation, the resuscitation and critical-care escalation and the disposition decision belong to the Perinatal/women's mental health and emergency psychiatry notes, and an answer here stops cleanly at that boundary.

26.8 The vignette that resolves on a physiological state

Pregnancy, lactation, advanced age and childhood are second variables of the same species as an organ, except that they move several things at once and often carry a second patient or a developing one. The stem usually presents a woman established on treatment who is now pregnant, an older patient on several medicines who has become confused or unsteady, or a child in whom an adult regimen has been scaled by weight and something has gone wrong. Distribution and clearance are altered, target sensitivity changes, and the risk being balanced is no longer only the patient's own.

The reading move is to name what has changed and for whom, before naming any drug. In the older patient the variables are cumulative: reduced clearance, altered target sensitivity, more co-prescriptions and poorer tolerance of anticholinergic and sedative burden, which is why the answer there often lies in subtraction rather than substitution. In pregnancy and lactation the balance sits between exposure of the fetus or infant and the risk carried by an untreated maternal illness, so a decision to stop is itself a decision with risk on both sides. The agent-level detail across all four groups is developed in this chapter's lifespan section.

26.9 Look-alike stems and the answering spine

Consolidation is easiest in pairs. The table sets out the stems most often confused in this territory, against the second variable that separates them and the axis the reasoning lands on.

TWO STEMS THAT LOOK ALIKE	THE SECOND VARIABLE THAT SEPARATES THEM	THE AXIS IT LANDS ON
Deterioration in a patient whose psychiatric prescription never changed, against deterioration of the illness	Whether a non-psychiatric medicine was started or stopped, and when	Company
Toxicity on unchanged dosing, against toxicity after a dose increase	Whether renal or hepatic function has fallen since the dose was set	Organ
Marked adverse effects at an ordinary dose, against adverse effects from a co-prescribed inhibitor	Whether the reduced clearance was inherited or acquired	Genome against Company
A severe reaction to an anticonvulsant, against a benign drug eruption	Whether a categorical risk allele rather than an exposure level is what is being tested	Genome
A low measured concentration from too small a dose, against one from covert non-adherence	Whether exposure was ever achieved at any point in that trial	Sequence
A genuinely resistant illness, against a run of inadequate trials	Whether each earlier trial reached adequate dose, duration and adherence	Sequence
A drug-induced syndrome, against a deterioration of the disorder being treated	Whether the tempo, the drug history and the neuromuscular findings fit the prescription or the illness	Sequence

MNEMONIC

Company, Organ, Genome, Sequence

The four second variables spell COGS, and the prescription is only one cog: the vignette asks what the others are doing. **C**ompany, what else is on board, prescribed or not. **O**rgan, which tissue clears the agent and whether it is failing. **G**enome, what capacity and what risk alleles the patient brought. **S**equence, what has been tried, whether it was adequate, and what it produced. Each opens a different section of this chapter, and a stem is usually built on exactly one.

With the second variable identified, an answer that earns marks follows four moves in order.

- Name the second variable in pharmacological language, not as a description of the patient.
- State the mechanism by which it acts on this particular prescription.
- Choose the move that addresses that mechanism: a dose adjustment, a switch off the shared pathway, a measured concentration, a test before prescribing, or an audit of the sequence.
- Say what you would not do, and why the obvious algorithmic answer leaves the second variable untouched.

That last move is where the pharmacology becomes visible to an examiner. A candidate who answers that the drug should be stopped has answered a question about a patient. One who answers that it need not be stopped, because the problem is an added inhibitor that will clear, a level drawn at the wrong moment, or a trial that was never adequate, has answered a question about pharmacology. Every vignette in this territory rewards the second answer.

> Find the second variable - company, organ, genome or sequence - and answer with the mechanism by which it acts on this prescription, never with the next drug in the algorithm.

27 · Consolidation and quick review

Nothing in this chapter is about a drug on its own. Every section here starts where a psychotropic meets something else: another agent competing for the same clearing enzyme, an organ that no longer clears what it used to, an inherited difference in handling or in immune recognition, a life stage in which the exposure is shared, a treatment course in which adequate trials have already failed, or a syndrome the prescription itself produced. The pharmacology of the agent as an object was settled in the chapter before this one. What is settled here is what happens to that pharmacology once it stops being the only thing in the room.

Call that something else the **second variable**. This closing section teaches no new agent and no new syndrome, because each has been taught in the section that owns it. What remains is to state the argument those sections were arranged to make, and to convert it into something that can be produced from a blank page with the book shut. The argument is that safe psychopharmacology is the management of second variables, and that the reasoning is the same every time: work out what the second variable does to exposure or to effect, measure the thing that has changed where a measurement will inform the decision, and act on the established risk or the observed change rather than on the label the patient arrived with.

27.1 One argument, tested against six second variables

Read as a list of territories, this chapter is long and disconnected: emergencies, resistance, monitoring, interactions, prescribing in physical illness and across the lifespan, pharmacogenetics and the device-based treatments. Read as one argument it is a single claim tested six times. The claim is that a psychotropic's behaviour is predictable once you have named what else is acting on it, and that the things that can act on it are few and recurring.

The six recur because they are the routes this chapter's material keeps arriving by: something competing with the drug pharmacologically, a fall in the capacity to clear or tolerate it, a constitutional difference in how the molecule is handled or recognised, a life stage the standard dose was not derived in, a treatment history of adequate courses that already failed, and the drug having produced the presentation itself. Every item in this chapter is one of those six wearing a clinical name, which is why the same three moves answer all of them.

RULE **A psychotropic prescription is safe or unsafe only in the presence of its second variable, never on its own.** The agent's own pharmacology sets what it can do; the second variable sets what it will do in this patient. An answer that describes the drug and stops has described only what the molecule brings, and left out everything else acting on it.

27.2 Exposure or effect: the question that opens every answer

Before anything can be monitored or adjusted, the second variable has to be sorted into one of two kinds, because the two are managed differently and confused constantly. An **exposure change** means the same prescribed dose now produces a different concentration at the site of action: the drug is cleared faster or slower, absorbed or distributed differently, or displaced from the protein carrying it. An **effect change** means altered biological activity at a shared endpoint: two agents push that endpoint in the same direction, a receptor population has changed, or the tissue is more vulnerable than it was. Concentrations may be entirely unchanged in a purely pharmacodynamic interaction, but constancy of concentration is not part of the definition, and the two mechanisms coexist in the same pair often enough that neither excludes the other.

The distinction decides the response. An exposure problem is answered by changing exposure: the dose, the interval, the route, the co-prescribed inhibitor or inducer, or the agent itself if its elimination route is the compromised one. An effect problem is answered by reducing or removing one of the converging contributors, with direct monitoring of the shared endpoint, or by accepting the combination under closer observation; a level inside the reference range does not exclude benefit from dose reduction, because a concentration-dependent effect can still be lessened by lowering exposure. Candidates who cannot separate the two reduce a correct dose and leave an additive combination untouched.

It also decides whether a measurement will help at all. A concentration informs the exposure question but cannot by itself rule an effect problem in or out, so a level requested in a purely pharmacodynamic problem returns normal and is then misread as reassurance; the effect endpoint itself, clinical, electrocardiographic or laboratory, has to be watched directly.

27.3 The three moves, and why they run in that order

Once the second variable is named and sorted, the same sequence organises the answer whichever of the six it is. It is a revision scaffold rather than a prescribing algorithm, and it yields in two situations: act immediately where delay is unsafe, as in a suspected drug-produced emergency, and act on what is already established where a contraindication or a positive pretreatment test is known before the prescription. Measure first only where the result is needed to choose the action. Outside those, the order matters, because each step is meaningful only if the one before it has been done.

- Anticipate. Before the prescription is issued or changed, state what this second variable does to exposure or to effect. This is a prediction from pharmacology, and needs no measurement.
- Measure. Monitor the thing the prediction says will move, alongside the routine monitoring the drug and the patient already require, and expect more than one endpoint to need watching at once. Monitoring chosen this way is **anticipatory monitoring**: the test is selected

because a specific mechanism predicts a specific change, not because it belongs to a routine panel.

- Act. Change the prescription on the strength of either a sufficiently established prospective risk or an observed change, according to the urgency and the evidence, and not on the diagnostic label, the drug's reputation, or the fact that the patient has tolerated the agent before. A contraindicated interaction, organ impairment, a pregnancy hazard, a positive pretreatment test and a suspected toxic syndrome are all acted on before any injury has been observed.

Reversing any two produces a recognisable clinical error. Measuring without anticipating gives a number nobody knows how to read; acting without measuring leaves the prediction untested, which is defensible only where waiting would be unsafe or where the risk was already established; and anticipating and measuring without acting is the commonest of the three, which is how an abnormal result sits in a chart while the prescription that produced it continues unchanged. A fourth step closes the loop outward: reporting what happened, so that a hazard invisible to any single prescriber reaches the surveillance system that can see it.

Anticipate	Measure	Act	Report
WHAT THE VARIABLE CHANGES	THE THING PREDICTED TO MOVE	ON THE RISK OR THE CHANGE	SO THE NEXT PATIENT BENEFITS

27.4 A frame that names all six

Because the six recur and the three moves do not change, one retrieval frame serves the whole chapter. Hold it as six prompts rather than as six topics: under pressure the failure is almost never that a candidate does not know a second variable exists, but that they answer on the one the stem made obvious and never scan for the others.

MNEMONIC

Second drug, End-organ capacity, Constitution, Ontogeny, Non-response, Drug-produced syndrome

The six second variables spell the thing they are: **S**econd drug, meaning another agent competing for the same clearing enzyme, displacing the drug from protein binding, altering its renal handling, or pushing the same physiological endpoint in the same direction; **E**nd-organ capacity, meaning cardiac, hepatic, renal or neurological function below what the standard dose assumed; **C**onstitution, meaning the inherited metabolising phenotype and the immune risk alleles that predict a severe reaction to a specific agent; **O**ntogeny, meaning pregnancy, lactation, childhood and old age as physiological states rather than as diagnoses; **N**on-response, meaning adequate trials that have already failed; and **D**rug-produced syndrome, meaning the acute psychotropic emergencies and the severe idiosyncratic reactions. Scanning all six before answering is the habit this chapter exists to build.

Each of the six is taught in full in the section that owns it, with its own agents, mechanisms and figures. The frame below is a retrieval index rather than a teaching table, and it deliberately gives

the same four columns to all six, because the point of the chapter is that the columns do not change.

THE SECOND VARIABLE	WHAT IT CHIEFLY CHANGES	WHAT IS WATCHED	WHAT THE CHANGE MEANS FOR THE PRESCRIPTION
A second drug taken alongside	Exposure where the agents meet at an enzyme, transporter or binding protein; effect where they converge on one endpoint	The drug concentration for the exposure route where a validated and clinically useful assay exists, otherwise an appropriate clinical or laboratory exposure marker; the shared endpoint for the effect route	Separate the agents, change one, or adjust exposure. Not every interaction is enzymatic: some are renal, some purely additive
End-organ capacity that has fallen	Mostly exposure, through reduced clearance; for some agents the tolerable effect narrows as well	Organ function and organ injury markers, interpreted alongside a drug level only where a validated level exists	Prefer the agent whose elimination route is intact, and set the starting exposure to the organ rather than to the diagnosis
Constitution: the inherited handling and the risk alleles	Exposure for the metabolising variants; the probability of a specific severe reaction for the immune risk alleles	The phenotype where testing is available, ideally before the first prescription rather than after a reaction	An unexpected dose response is a signal to assess phenotype alongside adherence, interacting drugs, organ function and sampling validity, none of which excludes the others. Where the owning section indicates a pretreatment test, testing precedes prescribing
Ontogeny: pregnancy, lactation, the very young, the old	Exposure through altered physiology, and the number of people exposed to it	Both parties where the exposure is shared, and the endpoints the age group is vulnerable on	The dose derived in a healthy adult is a hypothesis, not a prescription, and the risk of leaving the illness untreated belongs in the same calculation
Non-response after adequate trials	Neither exposure nor effect, but the meaning of every subsequent prescription	Whether each trial was adequate in exposure and in duration, and whether the drug was actually taken	Establish adequacy before declaring resistance. A course never absorbed or never swallowed is not a failed trial of the drug
A syndrome the drug itself produced	The whole question, from what to add to what to withdraw	The temporal relation between the prescription change and the onset, read together with the syndrome-specific examination findings	Withdraw or withhold the responsible agent first. The rechallenge and substitution decision is a later and separate judgement

27.5 The monitoring layer, and what each measurement is really for

Monitoring is the chapter's connective tissue, and it is badly taught as a schedule to memorise. Monitoring detects drug exposure, the drug's own effects and the patient-specific modifiers acting on either, and much of what it detects is clinically silent, so each test is best held as a **monitoring proxy**: a visible quantity standing in for an invisible one. What a test proxies for tells you when it is worth taking, what a normal result fails to exclude, and which second variable an abnormal one points at.

WHAT IS MEASURED	WHAT IT IS ACTUALLY A PROXY FOR	THE SECOND VARIABLE IT EXPOSES FIRST
The drug's plasma concentration	Exposure achieved, as distinct from the dose written on the chart	A changed clearance, a competing agent, or a prescription that was never taken
The corrected QT interval on the electrocardiogram	A shared cardiac effect that several unrelated agents can each contribute to	Additive pharmacodynamic interaction, and patient-specific susceptibility to delayed repolarisation and torsades
Weight, glycaemia and the lipid profile	Cumulative metabolic effect, which accrues without any symptom announcing it	A slow effect burden that no acute presentation will reveal
The blood count	An emerging haematological adverse effect tied to particular agents, which the patient cannot feel and cannot report	A drug-produced reaction caught as it develops, rather than a constitutional susceptibility the count could have identified in advance
Renal function	The remaining capacity to eliminate what the kidney clears	An end-organ change that happened after the dose was set
The liver function tests	Hepatocellular injury. They detect damage and do not quantify metabolising capacity, so a normal set does not establish that clearance is intact	An end-organ change that happened after the dose was set, and sometimes a hazard the drug itself produced
The reported adverse reaction	A population signal that no individual clinic can generate alone	A hazard that is real in aggregate and invisible at any single bedside

Held this way, the monitoring sections stop being a timetable and become the second half of a prediction. It also supports **reverse retrieval**, the drill worth doing: instead of asking what to monitor for a given drug, take an abnormal result and produce the second variables that could have generated it. That is the direction an examiner's stem runs, and the direction a referral arrives in.

27.6 When the drug itself is the second variable

Two of the six deserve separating out, because in both the prescription has stopped being the intervention and become part of the problem. The first is non-response. Once adequate trials have failed, the question is no longer which agent is theoretically best but what the failure has

established, and the answer is to check exposure before accepting effect: a course that never reached an adequate concentration, or was never taken, teaches nothing about the drug. Only once adequacy is verified does the switch, combine and augment decision become real, and the same verification is what positions the resistance-indicated device treatments taught here as modalities in their own right. That positioning is not universal: electroconvulsive therapy may be used first line where a rapid or definitive response is required, and is not conditional on failed adequate drug trials.

The second is the drug-produced syndrome, where the discipline is the **iatrogenic differential**: asking of any new presentation in a patient on psychotropics whether the prescription could have caused it, before asking what else the patient has developed. Rigidity, fever, confusion, a rash, a fall in the blood count and a disturbance of consciousness are all things a psychiatric patient can acquire independently and all things a psychotropic can produce. Timing against the last prescription change, the exposure history and the syndrome-specific examination findings have to be integrated, and none of them is universally sufficient on its own, which is what makes the drug history part of the investigation rather than its background. What this chapter owns is the pharmacology: which agents and combinations precipitate each syndrome, the mechanism, the monitoring that anticipates it and the pharmacological management. The emergency-department presentation, the resuscitation and critical-care escalation and the disposition decision are set out in the Perinatal/women's mental health and emergency psychiatry notes.

27.7 The two ways candidates lose these marks

Two failures account for most of the marks lost here. The first is **label-driven prescribing**: answering from the diagnosis and the drug class when the stem's real content is the second variable it quietly supplied, whether that is a physical illness, a co-prescription, an ancestry, a pregnancy or a previous failed course. The second is treating monitoring as a ritual, reciting what is checked without saying what it is checked for, which reads as memorised and does not survive a supplementary question.

TRAP **Answering the drug question the stem appears to ask instead of the second-variable question it actually asks.** Vignettes here are built by taking an ordinary prescribing decision and adding one complication, so the marks sit almost entirely in that complication. Candidates who begin by classifying the drug and end by naming an agent write a fluent answer to the wrong question; an answer that opens by naming the second variable and saying whether it changes exposure or effect has already earned most of what is available.

PITFALL

Continuing an unchanged prescription through a changed patient. The dose was correct for the renal function, co-prescriptions, weight and physiological state that existed when it was written, and none of those is fixed. Dehydration, a medicine started elsewhere, a pregnancy, an intercurrent illness and simple ageing all move the second variable while the chart stays still. Reviewing the prescription against the patient's current state, rather than reissuing what was tolerated before, is the most transferable habit here.

27.8 Where this chapter stops, and what to carry in

A disciplined answer is defined as much by what it hands over as by what it teaches.

Consolidating this material includes consolidating its edges, because several neighbouring chapters treat the same drugs and the same syndromes from a different angle. Each of the following is worth rehearsing as a **boundary handover**: named where it touches the question, passed to its owner in one sentence, and left there.

- The principles this chapter applies, meaning half-life and steady state, the cytochrome substrate map, the therapeutic index and choice between agents within a single class, belong to the Psychopharmacology I: principles and core drug classes notes. This chapter uses them as instruments rather than deriving them.
- The emergency act for the drug-produced syndromes, meaning the presentation to the emergency department, the resuscitation and critical-care escalation and the disposition decision, belongs to the Perinatal/women's mental health and emergency psychiatry notes.
- The procedural technique of the device-based treatments, meaning how each is administered and the service arrangements it needs, is set out in the ECT and neurostimulation notes. This chapter keeps the modality and its utility across disorders.

IN INDIA

Two of the six second variables carry a decision that is made differently on Indian ground, and both are worth retrieving as decisions rather than as facts. Where the section that owns the testing framework indicates a pretreatment genetic test before a specific anticonvulsant in people of the ancestries at raised risk, the decision is to test before prescribing rather than to react after a severe cutaneous reaction has occurred. Where the patient's own slow-metaboliser phenotype has been determined, the decision is to follow the gene-drug recommendation that result carries. Where only the population frequency of the variant is known, the decision is ordinary cautious prescribing, opening at the lower end of the range and titrating against response, without labelling this patient a slow metaboliser: a frequency in a population is a prior probability and not a result in the person in front of you. In the first of these the second variable is known before the first prescription, and that is where anticipation is at its most complete.

GOOD TO REMEMBER

Finish every prescribing decision in a complicated patient with a spoken sentence: this agent, at this exposure, in the presence of this second variable, watched with this measurement. Said aloud on a ward round it exposes the limb nobody thought through, and it is the sentence that earns marks in a viva. A decision that cannot be completed in that form has not been made pharmacologically.

Carried into the examination, the whole chapter collapses to a sequence that survives when detail fails. Name the second variable the stem introduced. Say whether it changes exposure or effect. State what you would measure because of that, what you would do with the answer, and what you are handing to somebody else. Consolidation buys not more facts but faster access to the ones

already learned, so that under pressure the reasoning arrives as a method rather than as half-remembered warnings about individual drugs.

> Safe psychopharmacology is the management of second variables: name what else is acting on the prescription, decide whether it changes exposure or effect, measure the thing that moves where a measurement will inform the decision, and act on the established risk or the observed change rather than on the label.

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