Anxiety in Older Patients

Tyler Zahrli MD, MA
Rebecca Lundquist MD
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Objectives

To recognize the prevalence of anxiety among older patients.

To review common anxiety disorders among elderly patients.

To determine how to evaluate anxiety.

To assess management options for older patients with anxiety.

To evaluate challenging prescribing methodology.

Epidemiology of anxiety in older patients

The most common psychiatric disorders

About 15% of the US population is older than 65 years of age

Between 10-15% have an anxiety disorder (4.5-7.5 million individuals)

A higher percentage have some symptoms of anxiety

Over 40% of older adults with disability/limiting chronic medical illness

Specific phobia is the most common

Risk Factors

Heritability

Personality-neurotic, introverted, vulnerability, low self-efficacy

Disability, limited chronic medical illness, spousal events

Physiological

- Hyperactive HPA axis-increased cortisol
- Increased limbic activity
- Reduce volume of hippocampus and amygdala

Consequences

- Decreased quality of life
- Decreased physical activity
- Comorbid psychiatric conditions
  - depression and substance abuse
- Comorbid medical conditions
  - pain, migraine, lung/cardiac disease
- Increased risk of cognitive impairment/dementia
- Increased mortality

Anxiety Disorders

Specific phobia

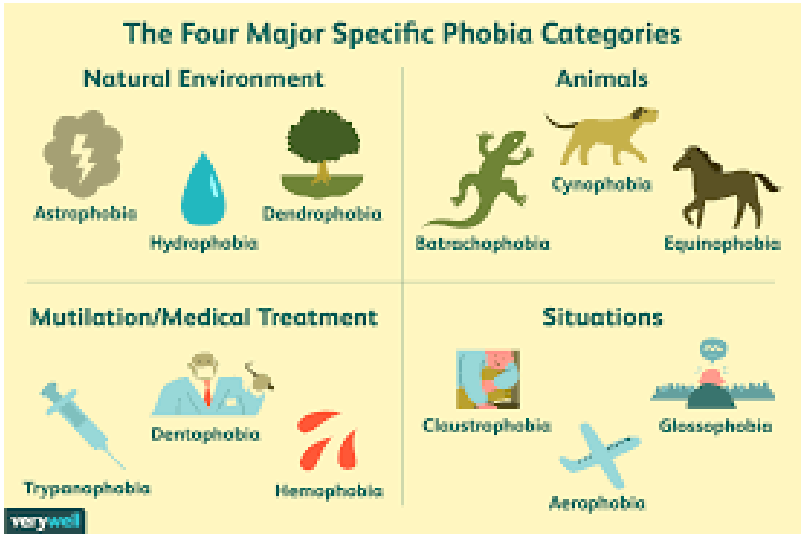
Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Agoraphobia

Panic Disorder

Social Anxiety Disorder

Specific Phobia



Marked fear of specific object or situation

Object or situation almost always causes fear/anxiety

Avoiding situation

Fear is out of proportion to actual danger

Clinically significant distress

Not explained by other factors

Examples: Falling, stroke/MI, choking

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Excessive worry more days than not

Difficult controlling worry

Three or more

- Restlessness
- Fatigue
- Decreased concentration
- Irritability
- Muscle tension
- Sleep disturbance

Clinically significant distress

Not contributable to medical illness or substances

6 months duration

Agoraphobia

- Two or more causing fear
  - Public transport
  - Open spaces
  - Enclosed spaces
  - Crowds/lines
  - Outside the home
- Fear/avoidance because cannot escape
- Situation(s) cause fear/anxiety and are avoided or require companion
- Out of proportion fear
- Not other medical cause
- Clinically significant distress
- 6 months

Does not respond well to medications.

Panic Disorder

Four or more of following

- palpitations, sweating, shaking, SOB, choking sensation, chest pain, nausea, dizziness, chills/heat, paresthesia, derealization, fear of losing control, fear of death

Can have culturally specific symptoms

1 month or more

Maladaptive behavior

Non-medical cause

Social Anxiety Disorder

Fear/anxiety possible scrutiny such as social interactions, observation, performing in front of others

Fears that anxiety will be negatively evaluated

Avoidance

Anxiety/fear out of proportion to situation

Clinically significant distress

Non-medical cause

6 months or more

Approach to Evaluation

Differential Diagnosis

Another anxiety disorder – easy to mix them up

Another psychiatric disorder

- neurocognitive disorder
- psychotic disorder
- personality disorder – paranoid, avoidant, dependent

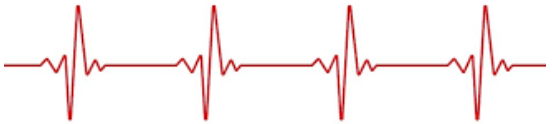
A medical condition contributing to anxiety symptoms

Medical Rule Out

Obtain history and estimate baseline function

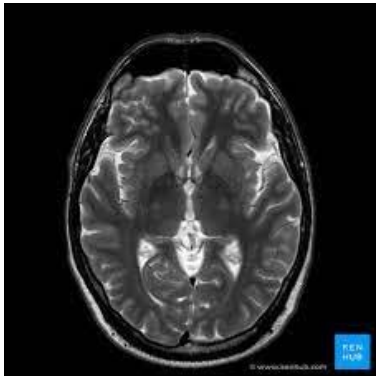
Physical examination-medical and neurological origins

Review medications-polypharmacy



Lab work

- Common: Metabolic Panel, CBC, Vitamin B12, folate, thyroid studies, UA, UDS
- Less Common: metaneph/catechol, RPR, HIV, homocysteine, methylmalonic acid



EKG

Neuroimaging

Assessment Tools

Self-reported measures

- GAD-7
- Worry Scale
- Beck Anxiety Inventory
- Penn State Worry Questionnaire

Clinical-rated

- Structure clinical interview
- Anxiety Disorders Interview Schedule
- Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale
- Physician Withdrawal Assessment

Complicated picture

- Neuropsychological assessment

GAD-7 Anxiety

Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
1. Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge	0	1	2	3
2. Not being able to sleep or control worrying	0	1	2	3
3. Worrying too much about different things	0	1	2	3
4. Trouble relaxing	0	1	2	3
5. Being so restless that it is hard to sit still	0	1	2	3
6. Becoming easily annoyed or irritable	0	1	2	3
7. Feeling afraid, as if something awful might happen	0	1	2	3

Column totals ____ + ____ + ____ + ____ =

Total score ____

If you checked any problems, how difficult have they made it for you to do your work, take care of things at home, or get along with other people?

Not difficult at all	Somewhat difficult	Very difficult	Extremely difficult
☐	☐	☐	☐

Source: Primary Care Evaluation of Mental Disorders Patient Health Questionnaire (PRIME-MD-PHQ). The PHQ was developed by Drs. Robert L. Spitzer, Janet B.W. Williams, Kurt Kroenke, and colleagues. For research information, contact Dr. Spitzer at rls8@columbia.edu.

Scoring GAD-7 Anxiety Severity

This is calculated by assigning scores of 0, 1, 2, and 3 to the response categories, respectively, of "not at all," "several days," "more than half the days," and "nearly every day." GAD-7 total score for the seven items ranges from 0 to 21.

0–5: mild anxiety

6–10: moderate anxiety

11–15: moderate anxiety

17–21: severe anxiety

Treatment

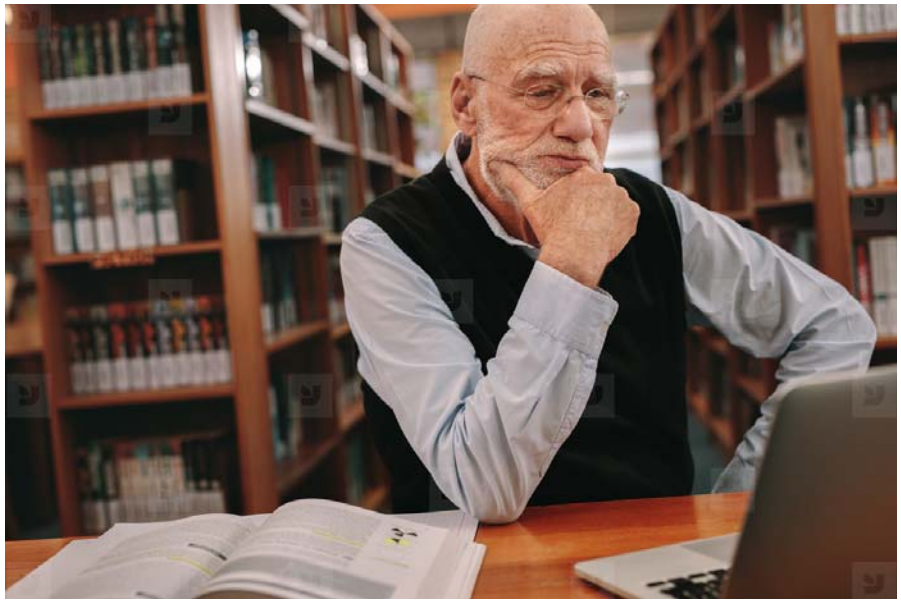
Recent Literature

Recent research has limited usefulness in clinical practice

CBT with behavioral activation and problem solving may be helpful

Most recent studies have had sample sizes that are quite small

Little research on anxiety and coexisting depressive disorders



Psychotherapy

Combination with pharmacology is often superior

Specific phobia

- exposure and response therapy
- SSRIs sometimes are helpful
- Benzodiazepines for certain situations (fear of flying, lorazepam)

GAD

- CBT relaxation, cognitive restructuring, behavioral activation

Agoraphobia

- CBT or psychodynamic therapy

SAD

- psychotherapy first line-CBT or social rehabilitation focus

Pharmacology-FDA Approved Agents

Specific Phobia

(paroxetine), sertraline

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

(paroxetine), escitalopram, venlafaxine, duloxetine, alprazolam, clonazepam, buspirone

Panic Disorder

sertraline, (paroxetine), fluoxetine.

can augment with non-serotonergic antidepressant

Social Anxiety Disorder

(paroxetine), sertraline, venlafaxine.

beta-blocker (propranolol for anxiety with public speaking)

Can take up to 8 weeks to see effects of SSRIs/SNRIs

Start low, go slow

Are all these medications good options?

Treating anxiety in patients with cognitive decline

Consider severity of both conditions

CHEIs can contribute to mood symptoms

Polypharmacy at low doses of each med can work better in some patients than larger doses of single medications

Psychopharmacology - Clinical Pearls

Avoid paroxetine use due to anticholinergic side effects.

Sertraline and escitalopram are good options to start with:

- Sertraline has the least risk of QTC prolongation, starting dose 25-50mg daily.
- Escitalopram, recommend starting lower dose in elderly, 5-10mg daily.

Citalopram has highest risk of QTC prolongation at higher doses.

Venlafaxine caution if hypertension, starting dose 37.5-75mg daily.

Benzodiazepines . . .

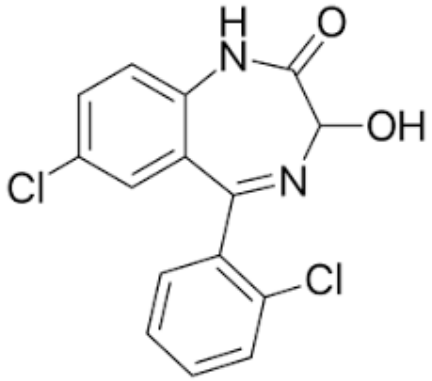
Benzodiazepine benefits and risks

Benefits

- Work quickly
- Can be used to “break” a cycle of high levels of acute anxiety or severe insomnia

Risks

- Physiologic dependence / withdrawal phenomena
- Often misused with other drugs of abuse
- Falling – leading to broken bones including hips and skulls which can be catastrophic and possibly deadly
- Connection with dementia – recent meta-analysis showed a significant increased risk, especially in those taking long half-life BZD and for longer than 3 years



Avoiding Benzodiazepine Trouble From The Start

Engage in a risk-benefit discussion with the patient.

Explain the concept of physiologic dependence.

Avoid prescribing in patients with substance misuse history and in patients taking opiates, barbiturates and who are misusing alcohol.

Set a date for reassessment of the usefulness of the medication, especially when patients are using daily.

Avoid long-term prescriptions for daily benzodiazepine use in order to avoid physiologic dependence which can give patients the illusion that they can “never” d/c BZD.

Alternatives to benzodiazepines for patients at risk

Hydroxyzine, diphenhydramine, ?gabapentin, propranolol

“Holding out” for long term solutions to work including psychotherapy and SSRI’s/SNRI’s

Getting out of benzodiazepine trouble

Explain to the patient that you have now learned more about benzodiazepine safety and you want to share what you now know

Express confidence that with time and determination, you can assist the patient in d/c of benzodiazepines even if they have been taking them for decades

If there is not an acute safety risk, slow downward tapers work best

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Questions?