

## Psychiatric emergency? What to consider before prescribing

Raj K. Kalapatapu, MD, PhD

Dr. Kalapatapu is Associate Professor of Psychiatry, University of California, San Francisco, School of Medicine; and Attending Psychiatrist, Psychiatric Emergency Services, Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital and Trauma Center, San Francisco, California.

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**P**sychediatric emergencies—such as a patient who is agitated, self-destructive, or suicidal—may arise in a variety of settings, including emergency departments and inpatient units.<sup>1</sup> Before emergently prescribing psychotropic medications to address acute psychiatric symptoms, there are numerous factors a clinician needs to consider.<sup>1-3</sup> Asking the following questions may help you quickly obtain important clinical information to determine which medication to use during a psychiatric emergency:

**Age.** Is the patient a child, adolescent, adult, or older adult?

**Allergies.** Does the patient have any medication allergies or sensitivities?

**Behaviors.** What are the imminent dangerous behaviors that warrant emergent medication use?

**Collateral information.** If the patient was brought by police or family, how was he/she behaving in the community or at home? If brought from a correctional facility or other institution, how did he/she behave in that setting?

**Concurrent diagnoses/interventions.** Does the patient have a psychiatric or medical diagnosis? Is the patient receiving any pharmacologic or nonpharmacologic treatments?

**First visit.** Is this the patient's first visit to your facility? Or has the patient been to

the facility previously and/or repeatedly? Has the patient ever been prescribed psychotropic medications? If the patient has received emergent medications before, which medications were used, and were they helpful?

**Legal status.** Is the patient voluntary for treatment or involuntary for treatment? If voluntary, is involuntary treatment needed?

**Street.** Was this patient evaluated in a medical setting before presenting to your facility? Or did this patient arrive directly from the community/street?

**Substance use.** Has the patient been using any licit and/or illicit substances?

In my experience with psychiatric emergencies, asking these questions has helped guide my decision-making during these situations. They have helped me to determine the appropriate medication, route of administration, dose, and monitoring requirements. Although other factors can impact clinicians' decision-making in these situations, I have found these questions to be a good starting point.

### References

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