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To: OMH Facility, Clinical, Medical and Nursing Directors; Directors of NYS
OMH Licensed Programs

From: Lloyd I. Sederer, M.D., OMH Medical Director

Subject: Health Advisory – Clozapine: Managing Constipation and GI Hypomotility

Date: May 18, 2015

Clozapine is the preferred medication choice for treatment-resistant schizophrenia.

We know from growing experience that **constipation** is an under-recognized potential side effect of clozapine that occurs in about 30% of treated patients. Untreated constipation can be associated with **serious medical complications**, including fecal impaction, bowel obstruction and perforation, paralytic ileus, megacolon, gastrointestinal ischemia, acute abdomen, and even death. **Patients at elevated risk** for constipation include: patients on opiates or medications with anticholinergic activity, including clozapine; patients with poor hydration; and those who are sedentary and on low-fiber diets.

Clozapine is responsible for the highest rate of **mortality** stemming from constipation complications among patients treated with antipsychotics. This rate is more than three times the rate of mortality from medication-induced agranulocytosis. Thus, **all clinical staff** should be aware of this association and actively screen, monitor and provide early intervention for constipation.

Approaches for preventing, monitoring and treating constipation and gastrointestinal (GI) hypomotility associated with clozapine include:

- **Screen** patients regularly for constipation and monitor GI hypomotility, not only during initial treatment but also during the continuation treatment.
- Employ **Prevention**, which includes asking patients about and encouraging adequate hydration, a high-fiber diet, and increasing levels of physical activity.
- **Treat** assertively with stimulant laxatives and stool softeners, while reviewing medication lists and, when possible, reducing unnecessary anticholinergic drugs.
- Develop and implement a plan for **ongoing individualized monitoring** of patients with a known history of constipation.

Our patients' safety and health depend on your attention to this matter.

Thank you.

Lloyd I. Sederer, MD
Chief Medical Officer, NYS Office of Mental Health