

## **PHENOBARBITAL SHOULD BE A FIRST LINE AGENT FOR THE TREATMENT IN EPILEPSY**

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In 1912, PB became one of the first agents used against epilepsy and is now a very widely used anti-epileptic drug (AED) in the world. Its low cost and accepted use for a wide range of seizure types has led to its position as the World Health Organization's first-line AED in developing countries.

During the 1970s, Gastaut and Osuntokun advocated the use in developing countries of antiepileptic drugs, including Phenobarbital, which were considered to be particularly desirable because of their low cost and the quality of the treatment they provided. Similar arguments are still valid today, despite the discovery of new antiepileptics.

The use of Phenobarbital is been criticized because of the risk of withdrawal seizures, heightened if supplies are interrupted, the risk of drug abuse, interaction with alcohol, the triggering of suicide attempts, and a high level of toxicity. The main neurotoxic effects include sedation, behavioral problems (in particular, hyperactivity), impaired cognition, and depressed mood and affect.

A number of studies have evaluated the neurotoxicity of PB in a range of clinical settings, but only a few had a randomized controlled design. As a result, Phenobarbital is no longer used in developed countries and its continued use in developing countries has been described as a form of discrimination (Shorvon 1988). However, it has been argued that in poor regions, particularly in rural areas, the price to pay for a drug is its side-effects, and that the choice is not between Phenobarbital and a new medicament but between Phenobarbital and no treatment at all (Meinardi 1993).

Phenobarbital (PB) is one of the oldest AEDs still in clinical use, but its value in the treatment of SE is controversially discussed. PB has fallen out of favor in many countries across Europe because of anecdotal evidence of hypotension, arrhythmias, and hypopnea. In fact there are only limited studies available assessing the efficacy of PB in SE.