



## Sertraline effective for acute major depression

### Clinical question

How effective is sertraline (escitalopram) in the acute phase treatment of major depression?

### Bottom line

There was evidence favouring sertraline over some other antidepressants for the acute phase treatment of major depression, in terms of efficacy, compared with fluoxetine, (NNT\* 10; range, 6 to 14) or acceptability/tolerability, compared with amitriptyline, imipramine, paroxetine and mirtazapine. Follow-up was limited to 24 weeks. However, there were also some differences favouring newer antidepressants in terms of early response (mirtazapine) and acceptability (bupropion). In terms of individual side effects, sertraline was generally associated with a higher rate of participants experiencing diarrhoea.

\* NNT = number needed to treat to benefit 1 individual

### Caveat

The overall quality of included studies was low and the reporting of trials was often inadequate. The included studies did not report on all the outcomes that were pre-specified in the protocol of this review. Outcomes of clear relevance to patients and clinicians, in particular, patients' and their relatives' attitudes to treatment, and their ability to return to work and resume normal social functioning, were not reported in any of the included studies.

### Context

Depression is the fourth leading cause of disease burden worldwide and is expected to show a rising trend over the next 20 years. Although both pharmacological and psychological interventions are effective for major depression, antidepressant drugs remain the mainstay of treatment. During the last 20 years, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors have progressively become the most commonly prescribed antidepressants.

### Cochrane Systematic Review

Cipriani A et al. Sertraline versus other antidepressive agents for depression. Cochrane Reviews 2009, Issue 2. Article No. CD006117. DOI: 10.1002/14651858CD006117.pub2.  
*This review contains 59 trials involving about 10,000 participants.*

PEARLS No. 258, April 2010, written by Brian R McAvoy

*PEARLS are succinct summaries of Cochrane Systematic Reviews for primary care practitioners – developed by the Cochrane Primary Care Field, New Zealand Branch of the Australasian Cochrane Centre at the Department of General Practice and Primary Health Care, University of Auckland and funded by the New Zealand Guidelines Group. New Zealanders can access the Cochrane Library free via [www.nzgg.org.nz](http://www.nzgg.org.nz)*

*PEARLS provide guidance on whether a treatment is effective or ineffective. PEARLS are prepared as an educational resource and do not replace clinician judgement in the management of individual cases. View PEARLS online at: [www.nzdoctor.co.nz](http://www.nzdoctor.co.nz); [www.nzgg.org.nz](http://www.nzgg.org.nz); [www.cochraneprimarycare.org](http://www.cochraneprimarycare.org)*



THE COCHRANE  
COLLABORATION®



New Zealand  
**GUIDELINES GROUP**  
*Te Rōpū Rarangi Tohutohu*

Promoting Effective Health and Disability Services