Discontinuation of drug treatment due to side effects after first-time percutaneous coronary intervention: a patient perspective.

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Background: Discontinuation of prescribed drug treatment after percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI) is common. Further, poor adherence to dual antiplatelet therapy (DAPT) may lead to immediate stent thrombosis within days or weeks with serious consequences. This is concerning as discontinuation of prescribed treatment is associated with poor clinical outcomes, higher readmission rates, increased health costs and increased morbidity and mortality. Accordingly, side effects are common causes of treatment discontinuation.

Purpose: To describe to what extent side effects from medications result in treatment discontinuation after first-time PCI.

Methods: Interviews of 22 patients purposefully selected from the Norwegian Registry for Invasive Cardiology were carried out 6-9 months after first-time PCI and analysed by qualitative content analysis. The time interval was chosen as adherence to DAPT generally starts to decline after 6 months and has significantly declined by 12 months. Interviews were organized around a set of predetermined open-ended questions and were conducted between December 2016 and April 2017.

Findings: Patients experienced side effects from their cardiac medication, ranging from seemingly minor side effects, such as gastrointestinal discomfort, to more disabling side effects such as severe muscle and joint pain, fatigue and gastric ulcers. Severe muscle or joint pain or fatigue was ascribed to statin treatment, whereas gastric ulcers were ascribed to DAPT treatment. Nuisance bleedings (i.e. nosebleeds, bruising) were ascribed to DAPT treatment. Unlike other studies, patients in our study did not describe nuisance bleedings as a reason for treatment discontinuation. However, nuisance bleedings were described as troublesome and had an impact on the patients’ quality of life. Disabling side effects were described as a reason for treatment discontinuation.

Conclusion: To avoid treatment discontinuation, healthcare professionals have to consider side effect profiles of medications and discuss these in a plain language tailored to the individual patient as this may improve health literacy and medication adherence. Consequently, patients need to keep an open dialogue with their healthcare professionals about side effects they are experiencing so that dosages can be adjusted or new alternative drugs can be started.