

April 24, 1986

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Dear Dick,

A few weeks ago, I was consulted on the question of hepatotoxicity to phenelzine. After a literature survey, in which I found no examples to justify an association, I re-read the PDR package insert, to find that there are assertions of risk. In some texts, risks are described for the class of compounds, usually including iproniazid as well as phenelzine and tranylcypromine. I did find many reports of toxicity to iproniazid, and I wonder if the package insert description is not a spillover, 'guilt by association', from the chemical similarity of the two compounds?

I would like to pose a question to your experts for the Journal:

What is the degree of risk of hepatotoxicity for depressed patients receiving phenelzine therapy? Is the risk sufficient to require that we modify the written advice (as to diet and risks) we regularly give our patients before we institute this therapy?

Thanks for your help. My best regards.

Sincerely yours,

Max Fink, M.D.  
Professor of Psychiatry