

# IASP Recommendations for the Stepwise Pharmacological Management of Neuropathic Pain

## Step 1

- Initiate therapy for the disease causing neuropathic pain, if applicable
- Initiate symptom treatment with one or more of the following first-line medications:

### First-Line Medications

- Secondary amine TCA (nortriptyline, desipramine)
- SNRI (duloxetine, venlafaxine)
- $\alpha_2\delta$  ligand, either gabapentin or pregabalin
- Topical lidocaine, alone or in combination with one of the other first-line therapies for patients with localized peripheral neuropathic pain

*Note: for patients with acute neuropathic pain, neuropathic cancer pain or episodic exacerbations of severe pain and when prompt pain relief during titration of a first-line medication is required, opioid analgesics or tramadol may be used alone or in combination with one of the first-line therapies.*

- Evaluate patient for non-pharmacological treatments and initiate if appropriate

## Step 2

- Reassess pain and health-related quality of life frequently
- If substantial pain relief (e.g., average pain reduced to  $\leq 3/10$ ) and tolerable adverse effects, continue treatment
- If partial pain relief (e.g., average pain remains  $\geq 4/10$ ) after an adequate trial, add one of the other four first-line medications
- If no or inadequate pain relief (e.g.,  $<30\%$  reduction) at target dosage after an adequate trial, switch to an alternative first-line medication

## Step 3

- If trials of first-line medications alone and in combination fail, consider second- and third-line medications or referral to a pain specialist or multidisciplinary pain center

### Second-Line Medications

- Tramadol
- Opioid analgesics

### Third-Line Medications

- Certain antidepressants (bupropion, citalopram, paroxetine)
- Certain antiepileptics (carbamazepine, lamotrigine, oxcarbazepine, topiramate, valproic acid)
- Topical low concentration capsaicin
- Dextromethorphan
- Memantine
- Mexiletine

IASP = International Association for the Study of Pain;

SNRI = serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor; TCA = tricyclic antidepressant

Adapted from: Dworkin RH et al. *Mayo Clin Proc* 2010; 85(3 Suppl):S3-14.