mhGAP-Intervention Guide (mhGAP-IG 2.0) Addendum on the use of valproic acid (sodium valproate) in women and adolescent girls of reproductive age
March 2022

The mhGAP-IG (WHO, 2016) is based on the recommendations contained in WHO’s mhGAP guidelines, which are being updated regularly. Prior to the next update, this addendum is published to ensure that the current mhGAP-HIG reflects available evidence and good practice on the use of valproic acid (sodium valproate) in women and adolescent girls of reproductive age.

Which mhGAP-IG modules does this addendum apply to?
This addendum applies to all instances where use of valproic acid (sodium valproate) is mentioned. This includes:

- Depression module (DEP) p.26
- Psychoses module (PSY) p.38-43
- Epilepsy module (EPI) p.63-66

What is being advised in this addendum?

DO NOT USE valproic acid (sodium valproate) in women who are pregnant or who are planning pregnancy, because of potential harm to the fetus from the medication.

DO NOT USE valproic acid (sodium valproate) in women and adolescent girls of reproductive age, unless alternative treatments are ineffective or not tolerated because of the high risk of birth defects and developmental disorders in children exposed to valproic acid (sodium valproate) in the womb.

Women and adolescent girls of reproductive age who are prescribed valproic acid (sodium valproate) should be advised to use effective contraception, without interruption during the entire duration of treatment. They must be provided with information on risks associated with valproic acid (sodium valproate) use during pregnancy, pregnancy prevention and referred for contraceptive advice if they are not using effective contraception. Individual circumstances should be evaluated in each case, when choosing the contraception method involving the woman in the discussion, to guarantee her engagement and compliance with the chosen measures.

If a woman is planning to become pregnant, a person trained in the management of epilepsy/bipolar disorder in pregnant women should consider alternative treatment options. Women should be informed to consult their physician as soon as they are planning pregnancy and the need to urgently consult their physician in case of pregnancy.

Every effort should be made to switch to appropriate alternative treatment prior to conception. If switching is not possible, the woman should receive further counselling regarding the risks of valproic acid (sodium valproate) for the unborn child to support her informed decision-making.

A specialist should periodically review whether valproic acid (sodium valproate) is the most suitable treatment for the person.

1. See https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/family-planning-contraception