Reviewer’s report

Title: A Canadian naturalistic study of a community-based cohort treated for bipolar disorder

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Reviewer: Guy Goodwin

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The manuscript presents data from the CNS-Bipolar (Canadian Naturalistic Study — Bipolar Disorder). This was designed as an observational study of outcomes in outpatients with manic symptoms receiving routine psychiatric care.

The potential strengths of the study were inclusion of more real-world patients with bipolar disorder and substance abuse and other comorbid conditions. There was good retention to 1 month > 90%. There was an apparent advantage to olanzapine at 1 month in both observer and some self ratings.

The potential weaknesses were those equally associated with such studies: it is essential that they are addressed more comprehensively

1) The potential problem of performance bias in observer rated studies supported by a drug sponsor needs specific address in the methods section, together with, preferably, evidence that is reassuring. Self ratings by patients for example, would be helpful. Thus, does the BAI and QOL correlate with the mania rating by the investigators? BAI appears to.

2) Discussion of the limitations for QOL in detecting short term change would be helpful.

3) The heterogeneity of treatment, centre, previous history of the disorder will influence symptom outcomes.

4) Olanzapine’s problem is weight gain/metabolic disturbance: I seemed to miss any reference to this in results?

5) Finally the conclusion states:

‘treatment with olanzapine works quickly to bring about clinically significant and measurable changes in illness severity’. Can we be reassured that these rather modest effects are clinically significant?

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable
Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I have received grants from P1vital, Sanofi-Aventis and Servier and honoraria from AstraZeneca, BMS, Eisai, Lundbeck, Sanofi-Aventis and Servier. I have been a paid independent advisor for AstraZeneca, BMS, Eli Lilly, Lundbeck, P1Vital, Sanofi-Aventis, Servier and Wyeth.