2.10. Knowledge of psychopharmacology in work with children and young people

Knowledge and skills in child and adolescent psychopharmacology required by the whole team

- An ability to carry out a diagnostic assessment (or get the appropriate help to carry it out) to identify children/young people with a condition where medication may be indicated
- An ability to draw on knowledge of the role of medication in the treatment of children/young people with mental health problems
- An ability to draw on knowledge that prescribing and monitoring medication may have varying intensity and duration, depending on the complexity, comorbidity and chronicity of the condition treated
- An ability to identify people in the team who have enough knowledge of child psychopharmacology to be able to refer on appropriately when necessary (usually to a child psychiatrist or other medical practitioner)
- An ability to refer to a child psychiatrist or other medical practitioner when medication may be indicated, or where there are concerns about the child/young person's progress that relate to psychotropic medication(s) that are currently being prescribed
- An ability to draw on knowledge of evidence for the benefits of medication alone and medication in combination with psychological interventions
- An ability to draw on knowledge of medications commonly prescribed in child and adolescent psychopharmacology, and the conditions they are prescribed for
- An ability to draw on knowledge that medications have benefits and risks

Implementing knowledge of psychopharmacology in child and adolescent work

- An ability to draw on knowledge of national guidance for treatment of child and adolescent disorders that include recommendations for medication (e.g. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence [NICE] or Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network [SIGN] guidelines), and:
  - an ability to recognise that medication can be prescribed in the absence of specific NICE/SIGN guidance
  - an ability to draw on relevant evidence that indicates the basis for safe and effective prescribing, and that there are different levels of evidence
- An ability to draw on knowledge of disorders that present in child and adolescent mental health services, where medication potentially forms part of the intervention, e.g.:
  - attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
  - psychosis (schizophrenia and bipolar disorder)
  - anxiety disorders, including obsessive-compulsive disorder
  - depression

- An ability to draw on knowledge of the ways in which medication should be combined with psychological or other interventions to maximise its effectiveness
- An ability to draw on knowledge of disorders presenting in child and adolescent mental health services where there is no evidence base for using medication as a primary treatment, e.g.:
  - oppositional defiant disorder
  - conduct disorder
  - autism spectrum disorders
  - learning disability

- An ability to draw on knowledge of common concerns/controversies about prescribing psychotropic medication for children/young people, while keeping a balanced view of the utility of psychopharmacology with children/young people, e.g.:
  - the restricted number of randomised controlled trials with children/young people, and so the limited evidence base
  - the need to weigh-up benefits versus risks for each child/young person in the short and long term
  - that most medications prescribed for children are not specifically licensed for children

Working with clients

- An ability to discuss with children/young people and their families:
  - the potential role and benefits of medication in their treatment regimen
  - the potential side effects of medications
- An ability to recognise significant side effects and take appropriate action (e.g. refer to a child psychiatrist or medical practitioner)

Specialist knowledge and skills in child and adolescent psychopharmacology

- An ability (for appropriately qualified medical practitioners) to provide specialist assessment that includes the detection and diagnosis of conditions for which medication may be indicated

- An ability to prescribe medication, employing the knowledge and skills identified as underpinning this activity by the relevant professional body[a]
- An ability for child psychiatrists in a team to act as a resource to their colleagues (e.g. providing advice or consultation, or offering relevant training in child psychopharmacology)
- An ability to recognise that people involved in prescribing psychopharmacological treatments for children/young people require ongoing training, professional development and supervision

[a] In the UK, these competences have been specified in the approved specialty and sub-specialty curricula set out by the General Medical Council (A Competency Based Curriculum for Specialist Training in Psychiatry Specialist Module in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry: Specialist Module in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, London: Royal College of Psychiatrists; 2013).