

Parkinson's medicine has odd side effect: gambling

By **KATHLEEN FACKELMANN**
USA TODAY

A 52-year-old married man had gambled away more than \$100,000 when his wife finally asked for help.

She didn't call Gamblers Anonymous. Instead, she talked to the Mayo Clinic doctor who had been treating her husband for Parkinson's, an incurable brain disorder.

M. Leann Dodd of the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., and a team of neurologists identified 11 cases in which compulsive gambling had developed almost overnight in people

who were taking medication for Parkinson's.

"Most of these patients had no idea this gambling problem was connected to their Parkinson's medication," Dodd says. She and her colleagues described the cases last year in the Archives of Neurology.

The study — and others like it that suggest that Parkinson's medication might trigger a

gambling urge for some patients — serve as a warning for the estimated 1 million people in the United States who have the disease. But such research also might help millions of

Americans who have a gambling habit.

"The research may teach us about pathological gambling in the general population," says Mark Stacy, a Duke University neurologist who outlined the evidence on Parkinson's and gambling recently at the World Parkinson Congress in Washington.

The growing body of research includes a study published in February in the Archives of Neurology. Ana Szafrman of the Food and Drug Administration used a computer program to search the

FDA's national database to see whether there were any reports of gambling linked to prescription drugs.

Szafrman and her colleagues discovered 67 cases of gam-

bling. Medications used to treat Parkinson's accounted for most of those, but one Parkinson's drug stood out: Pramipexole or Mirapex had 39 reports of gambling. This drug alone accounted for 58 percent of the cases of gambling reported to the FDA, says co-author P. Murali Doraiswamy, who is also at Duke University.

GAMBLING

RECOGNIZING THE WARNING SIGNS

- Spending a lot of time thinking about gambling.
- An urge to gamble with increasing amounts of money.
- Lying to family or friends about gambling habits.
- Repeated attempts to cut back or stop gambling.
- Writing bad checks, stealing or taking out loans to pay for gambling.

Source: *The National Council on Problem Gambling*