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THE REALITY OF TAKING ANTIPSYCHOTIC MEDICATION

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Antipsychotic medication provides effective treatment for patients with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Patient satisfaction with antipsychotics is positively associated with improvement in psychotic symptoms and treatment adherence. However, some patients, whilst recognising their need for effective intervention, have specific concerns over their management. If these concerns are not adequately addressed the patients remain unsatisfied and may become non-adherent.

Health-related attitudes and beliefs of the patients and insights about their illness may affect patients' decisions on taking medications in the short and long term. Therefore, it is essential for physicians to communicate with their patients about their beliefs regarding their mental and physical health. Careful assessment of the environmental characteristics of the patient relevant to health may also decrease the risk of non-adherence. Improvement of a patient's treatment adherence using specific motivational interview techniques should also be discussed.

At the outset patients are often concerned over the possibility of treatment-related adverse events (AEs) such as headache, somnolence and weight gain with antipsychotic treatment. If such AEs do occur, patients have to develop coping strategies and may be tempted to self-manage, which can lead to treatment discontinuation and/or selective adherence.

A joint decision-making process between patient and clinician will allow a rational approach to treatment selection and adherence, and the provision of supportive networks will ensure that there is an opportunity for patients to learn about the effects of their medication.