

Editorial

4th International Psychiatry Forum – bipolar disorders

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This psychiatry forum examines several key issues of current interest to clinicians and researchers in the field of bipolar disorders. These include similarities in pathology between bipolar disorder and personality disorders, similarities and differences in bipolar disorder treatment between the USA and Europe, treatment options for acute mania, and finally, issues surrounding the management of bipolar disorder during pregnancy and lactation.

Treatment of bipolar disorder is complicated by subtle differences between subtypes, multiple treatment choices, etc. These complications increase dramatically for pregnant women because of the increased risk of recurrence, especially during the postpartum period, and the teratogenic and toxic effects of treatments. Professor Pierre Thomas and Dr W. Emanuel Severus discuss these issues and the available treatment options (counselling, non-pharmacological therapy [observation and psychotherapy, nutritional supplements, morning light therapy], pharmacotherapy) during pregnancy and lactation. Detailed and constructive pretreatment pregnancy planning should involve the patient and include close clinical monitoring, and treatment schedules should be adjusted for disease severity. A careful balance is needed when considering treatment between risks to the mother versus those to the developing infant.

Dr Charles Bowden and Professor Wolfgang Maier discuss links in pathology and overlaps in diagnosis between personality disorders and bipolar disorders. These authors also address the issue of how comorbidity with personality disorders in bipolar disorder patients not only complicates diagnosis, but also has a detrimental effect on patient outcome. However, treatment for comorbid patients seems to be similar to that for bipolar patients (divalproate and lithium are the mainstays for acute and chronic therapy).

While the similarities between bipolar disorder and personality disorder present a challenge when formulating a diagnosis, the exploitation of such links may help in the further elucidation of the aetiology and treatment of these disorders.

The knowledge base regarding the medical treatment of acute bipolar mania has increased in recent years. Professor Pierre Thomas provides a timely review of the currently available treatment options for acute mania. Professor Thomas overviews the efficacy and safety profiles of mood stabilisers (lithium, divalproate, carbamazepine), antipsychotics, benzodiazepines and electroconvulsive therapy. While monotherapy with a mood stabiliser is usually first-line therapy, combination therapy is needed to control symptoms in patients that are unresponsive to monotherapy. Professor Thomas discusses the use of stepwise pharmacological treatment and how current therapies are successful for the majority of patients. However, treatment-refractory patients highlight the need for further studies of novel treatments to ensure that these patients receive the most up-to-date therapy available.

There is a view in the clinical community that treatment of bipolar patients differs between the USA and Europe, with differences in clinical guidelines, diagnostic criteria and treatment options. Dr Charles Bowden and Professor Patrice Boyer investigate these claims with reference to evidence-based medicine, clinical guidelines and treatment of bipolar disorders. The authors show that although there are many similarities in treatment between the USA and Europe, some significant differences remain. The authors also consider the need for a global consensus on best practice for the treatment of bipolar disorders to provide patients with the best care possible.