

Involvement of patients and their families in treatment choices in a psychiatric setting

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Background. Patients' attitudes toward treatment and adherence to medication are a key aspect for successful antipsychotic therapy. Adherence to treatment depends both on the occurrence of side effects and on the quality of the relationship between patient and clinician [Nosè et al., 2012]. International guidelines for the treatment of severe mental disorders suggest that patients, and possibly their families, should be actively involved in the management of drug therapy, in order to improve adherence to therapy and its benefits [NICE, 09; The Maudsely Guide Line, 2007].

Aims. Our aim was twofold: 1) to evaluate the level of sharing key decisional aspects of treatment choices among clinicians, patients and their families in an urban psychiatric setting; 2) to measure concordance in the perception of benefits and side effects of drug treatment.

Methods. This study was conducted in 4 Community Mental Health Centres in Bologna and involved 152 antipsychotic recipients with diagnosis of psychotic disorders. Three different and structured questionnaires were administered to patients, their families/carers and clinicians/nurses to assess concordance in the treatment choice and the perception of benefits and side effects. After assigning specific scores to each answer, data were analyzed to compare the collected opinions.

Results. For 131 out of 152 recruited patients, the relative clinicians' form was also filled-in; of those patients, 48% were affected by schizophrenia, 20% by other psychotic disease and 18% by schizoaffective disorders. The majority of the patients received antipsychotic monotherapy (73%) and most of them took concomitant drugs, such as antidepressant (44%), benzodiazepines (42%) and mood stabilizers (33%). Clinicians and patients declared a high level of sharing in the choice of the treatment concerning the expected benefits (72% of patients and 66% of clinicians), whereas 17% of patients affirmed that no warnings was given by clinicians about side effects (vs. 5% of clinicians). As regard the actual perceived effects of drug therapy, patients were more positive about the benefit (46%) compared to clinicians (33%) and the concordance on side effect perception was high: few and tolerable for 43% of clinicians and 47% of patients.

In 42% of cases the family/carer was not involved in the study, primarily because the patient did not give consent (25%). The analysis of the 79 patient-family/carer forms showed high concordance on therapeutic benefit in 57% of cases, whereas only 24% of patient-family/carer pairs were concordant on perception of side effects.

Conclusions. Involvement of patients and their families/carers in treatment choices leads to a shared perspective of therapeutic benefit. Less concordance was found concerning side effects, both in terms of information provided to patients at the start of therapy and in terms of adverse event perception during the treatment.

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Taylor D et al. (2007). *The Maudsley Prescribing Guideline ninth edition*. Informa