

Introduction

New Treatments for Bipolar Disorder

This supplement to *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* has been produced as part of a continuing medical education initiative titled Bipolar Care OPTIONS: Optimal Therapeutic Interventions Based on New Strategies. The goal of the Bipolar Care OPTIONS initiative is to improve the recognition, diagnosis, and treatment of bipolar disorder, which, in its various manifestations, is estimated to affect more than 3% of the population.

To achieve this goal, Bipolar Care OPTIONS has developed and disseminated evidence-based educational materials designed to speed the accurate diagnosis of bipolar disorder, identify pharmaceutical treatments and counseling strategies likely to promote long-term adherence to therapeutic regimens, fashion a clinically meaningful definition of remission, and address many of the other challenges all of us struggle with in caring for patients with this serious, potentially life-threatening, mood disorder.

We are fortunate to practice at a time when our understanding of neurobiology is increasing dramatically, and when new pharmacologic agents and other interventions offer the prospect for improving patient outcomes and quality of life.

As important as this progress has been, further improvement is needed. One critical need is reducing the high percentage of patients who experience relapses: more than 80% of patients with bipolar I disorder will relapse within 5 years of their initial episode. Decreasing the rate of relapse will require better approaches to long-term maintenance therapy that will increase patient compliance with prescribed treatments and help patients to manage the side effects of their medications. Another significant challenge is to differentiate more accurately bipolar disorder from its many comorbid psychiatric disorders and effectively treat both bipolar and the comorbid disorders.

Each article in this supplement was written by a member of the Bipolar Care OPTIONS National Faculty (see the CME section for a list of contributors). The 7 subjects explored in the supplement are the recognition and diagnosis of bipolar disorder (Dr. Hirschfeld), the course of the disease (Dr. Keller), optimization of treatment (Dr. Schatzberg), the use of combination therapy (Dr. Bowden), remission of bipolar disorder and maintenance therapies (Dr. Keck), the comorbidities of bipolar disorder (Dr. McElroy), and bipolar disorder in children and adolescents (Dr. Wagner).

The articles are based on a thorough review of the literature, the authors' clinical knowledge and experience, and consultations with the OPTIONS Regional Faculty. The Regional Faculty is composed of approximately 90 leading psychiatrists and other physicians. These physicians met at 1 of 7 meetings chaired by a National Faculty member to address one of the subjects reviewed in this supplement.

Another important component of the OPTIONS program's educational efforts is the Call to Clinical Action (see page 4), which was developed collaboratively by the National and Regional Faculties. Derived from recent research into bipolar disorder and the experience of faculty members in treating patients, the Call to Clinical Action is a concise summary of steps for enhancing the evaluation, diagnosis, treatment, and long-term management of bipolar disorder.

The supplement reviews important recent research into the diagnosis and treatment of bipolar disorder. We hope that this information will help psychiatrists in their continuing efforts to improve the care of their patients with bipolar disorder.

The National Summit Meeting of the Bipolar Care OPTIONS initiative was held September 4–6, 2003, in Washington, D.C., and supported by an unrestricted educational grant from Janssen Medical Affairs, L.L.C.