

# Introduction

## Treatment of Panic Disorder: The State of the Art

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Panic disorder, with or without agoraphobia, is an illness that significantly affects a person's quality of life. Patients may be unable to fully participate in activities that most people take for granted; those with agoraphobia have considerably restricted lifestyles. The chronic nature of panic disorder must be taken into account when planning health care services, educating patients, and deciding on treatment.

The key to effective treatment of panic disorder is early recognition of the condition. As more and more persons are enrolled in managed care programs, the burden of diagnosis falls increasingly on the primary care provider, who serves as a gatekeeper to mental health specialists. We need to ensure that these practitioners are educated about the symptoms, course, and complications of panic disorder. In their expanding therapeutic role, primary care physicians will need to be skilled in managing this disorder as well.

Deciding when and to whom to refer a patient with panic disorder can be difficult. Because the symptoms of panic disorder can be confused with those of heart disease, for example, patients frequently are evaluated by cardiologists and undergo expensive and unnecessary tests. Early referral to a psychiatrist or psychologist can be cost effective in the long run. As patients receive appropriate, effective treatment, the costs associated with inappropriate testing or therapy will be reduced, time lost from work minimized, and the patient's quality of life improved.

The purpose of this symposium, "Treatment of Panic Disorder: The State of the Art," was to bring together a group of clinician-researchers with extensive experience in treating patients with panic disorder to discuss the etiology, treatment, and long-term outcome of the illness. Each of these topics is summarized in the review articles included in this supplement. Following each article is a discussion of the topic by all members of the panel.

Through this supplement, we have attempted to provide the "state of the clinical art" with regard to panic disorder. We hope the information contained herein stimulates further discussion and research into this disorder.

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