

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dr. Wolff is a board-certified family physician in private practice in Cornelius, North Carolina. He finished his family practice residency in 1997. He has graciously consented to share stories from the trenches of primary care. While his practice diary is taken from actual patient encounters, the reader should be aware that some medication references may represent off-label uses.

We at the *Companion* are certain that these vignettes will inform, entertain, challenge, and stimulate our readers in their effort to address behavioral issues in the everyday practice of medicine.

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“Twin Angels”

Christian G. Wolff, M.D.

Monday

BG is a 17-year-old teenager with bipolar disease that I was able to get under psychiatric supervision, and overall, I suppose he has done well. I say “I suppose” because today, while in for a viral infection, he shared with me his latest tattoos, the sad and wicked angels on each shoulder which signify the extremes of his moods. Outside of his multiple piercings and body art, he really does appear to be even keeled. Really.

Tuesday

JL is a 60-year-old man whom I had referred to outpatient psychiatry in the past due to violent psychoses related to posttraumatic stress disorder. As with many patients, his relationship with his psychiatrist dwindled, and his care seemed to dribble back into my lap. Well, after being hospitalized last month for a chronic obstructive pulmonary disease exacerbation, he apparently decompensated to the point that I had to get him hospitalized in the psychiatric ward. I saw the harbinger of this after he was on oral steroids for 1 week but was unable to head off what seems to have been inevitable. After a few of his paranoid delusions, I'm not sure who is more relieved with his hospitalization: his family or me.

Wednesday

BH is a 30-year-old woman who has been suffering from a myriad of somatic complaints for all 5 years I have known her. I receive a missive from a different subspecialist to whom she self-refers each month or so. At our prior visit, I noted to myself that she had been treated with just about every anti-inflammatory and selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) that I know. I suggested that she try low-dose olanzapine. Today, less than 1 week later, I have her in for a follow-up and am surprised by the woman sitting upright and smiling before me. “Never felt better in my life!” is the verbatim quote from her lips. On top of that, she actually lost a pound! I've seen dramatic results at such low doses before, but hers is certainly the most profound to date. I will see her for follow-up in 2 weeks to make sure she doesn't respond by multiple trips to the ice cream parlor and add 10 pounds, but I have a feeling that she will do fine.

Thursday

I joke with my partners that I stay most up-to-date regarding medical information by reading the health section of my local newspaper every week. Today, to my consternation, the front page headline notes increased worries regarding suicide risk with teens and paroxetine, quoting an unnamed source from the National Institutes of Health as saying all SSRIs should be avoided in adolescents. I brace for the phone messages as I walk into the office today....

Friday

I've noticed that annually the return of the school year has been encroaching on the summertime with decreasing reluctance. We're barely into August and several local school systems are already in session. Today I've already seen my first anxious high school teacher and supposedly “attention deprived” child. And I thought the *political* season was getting too long!