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Resolving mental illness stigma: should we seek normalcy or solidarity?

Patrick Corrigan

Reducing excess mortality in severe mental illness: meta-review of health interventions

Amanda Baxter *et al*

Affective instability and the course of bipolar depression

Jonathan Stange *et al*

Practice nurse-led proactive care for chronic depression in primary care

Marta Buszewicz *et al*

- A13 Editorial Board
A15 Highlights of this issue

Editorials

- 309 **Biological v. psychosocial treatments: a myth about pharmacotherapy v. psychotherapy**
A. Prosser, B. Helfer and S. Leucht

- 311 **From asylum to psychiatric hospital in West Africa – extra**
Dami Ajayi

- 312 **Counterpoint: clinical neuroscience is not ready for clinical use**
M. D. Rego

- 313 **A Theory of Human Motivation by Abraham H. Maslow – reflection**
Kevin Healy

- 314 **Resolving mental illness stigma: should we seek normalcy or solidarity?**
P. W. Corrigan

Analysis

- 316 **NICE v. SIGN on psychosis and schizophrenia: same roots, similar guidelines, different interpretations**
T. Kendall, C. J. Whittington, E. Kuipers, S. Johnson, M. J. Birchwood, M. Marshall and A. P. Morrison, on behalf of the NICE guideline development group for CG178

- 320 **Invited commentary on . . .**
NICE v. SIGN on psychosis and schizophrenia
M. Taylor and U. Perera

- 321 **An 18th-century view of demonomania. 2: Vampirism – stories – psychiatry in history**
Fiona Subotsky

Review articles

- 322 **Reducing excess mortality due to chronic disease in people with severe mental illness: meta-review of health interventions**

A. J. Baxter, M. G. Harris, Y. Khatib, T. S. Brugha, H. Bien and K. Bhui

- 330 **Risk of depressive disorder following disasters and military deployment: systematic review with meta-analysis**

J. P. Bonde, N. Utzon-Frank, M. Bertelsen, M. Borritz, N. H. Eller, M. Nordentoft, K. Olesen, N. H. Rod and R. Rugulies

Papers

- 337 **Duration of depressive symptoms and mortality risk: the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA)**

J. White, P. Zaninotto, K. Walters, M. Kivimäki, P. Demakakos, J. Biddulph, M. Kumari, C. De Oliveira, J. Gallacher and G. D. Batty

- 343 **Cardiometabolic disease and features of depression and bipolar disorder: population-based, cross-sectional study**

D. J. Martin, Z. Ul-Haq, B. I. Nicholl, B. Cullen, J. Evans, J. M. R. Gill, B. Roberts, J. Gallacher, D. Mackay, A. McIntosh, M. Hotopf, N. Craddock, I. J. Deary, J. P. Pell and D. J. Smith

- 352 **Affective instability and the course of bipolar depression: results from the STEP-BD randomised controlled trial of psychosocial treatment**

J. P. Stange, L. G. Sylvia, P. V. da Silva Magalhães, D. J. Miklowitz, M. W. Otto, E. Frank, C. Yim, M. Berk, D. D. Dougherty, A. A. Nierenberg and T. Deckersbach

- 359 **Short-term venlafaxine v. lithium monotherapy for bipolar type II major depressive episodes: effectiveness and mood conversion rate**

J. D. Amsterdam, L. Lorenzo-Luaces, I. Soeller, S. Q. Li, J. J. Mao and R. J. DeRubeis

- 365 **'I am the man that mirthless lives' – psychiatry in literature**
Daniel Philippe Mason

- 366 **Discontinuation of antidepressant medication after mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for recurrent depression: randomised controlled non-inferiority trial**

M. J. Huijbers, P. Spinhoven, J. Spijker, H. G. Ruhé, D. J. F. van Schaik, P. van Oppen, W. A. Nolen, J. Ormel, W. Kuyken, G. J. van der Wilt, M. B. J. Blom, A. H. Schene, A. R. T. Donders and A. E. M. Speckens

- 374 **Practice nurse-led proactive care for chronic depression in primary care: a randomised controlled trial**

M. Buszewicz, M. Griffin, E. M. McMahon, K. Walters and M. King

- 381 **The Healthy Activity Program lay counsellor delivered treatment for severe depression in India: systematic development and randomised evaluation**

N. Chowdhary, A. Anand, S. Dimidjian, S. Shinde, B. Weobong, M. Balaji, S. D. Hollon, A. Rahman, G. T. Wilson, H. Verdelli, R. Araya, M. King, M. J. D. Jordans, C. Fairburn, B. Kirkwood and V. Patel

- 389 **Cultural differences in stigma surrounding schizophrenia: comparison between Central Europe and North Africa**

M. C. Angermeyer, M. G. Carta, H. Matschinger, A. Millier, T. Refaï, G. Schomerus and M. Toumi

Columns

- 398 Correspondence

- 400 Book reviews

- 403 Contents of *BJPsych Advances*

- 404 Contents of the *American Journal of Psychiatry*

- 405 Kaleidoscope

- 407 From the Editor's desk

Cover picture

Don Quixote and Sancho Panza (c.1870)
by Honoré-Victorin Daumier (1808–1879)

How can we judge what is truth and what is fiction? Cide Hamete Benengeli insists he is a reliable narrator of the history of *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha* – but isn't that how the Don got into this mess in the first place? Cervantes, who died 400 years ago this month, parodies the world and his readers through the madness of his obedient servant Don Quixote. Daumier, an old hand at parodying the human condition with his popular caricatures – had an affection for the Don, especially in his later years as his own eyesight was fading. Is that a gentleman and his servant approaching through the dusk, or a knight errant and his faithful squire?

Image: The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London

We are always looking for interesting and visually appealing images for the cover of the *Journal* and would welcome suggestions or pictures, which should be sent to Dr Allan Beveridge, British Journal of Psychiatry, 21 Prescott Street, London E1 8BB, UK or bjp@rcpsych.ac.uk.



Highlights of this issue

By Kimberlie Dean

Five trials of treatment approaches in depression

Three papers in the *BJPsych* this month present findings from depression treatment trials and two papers address treatment of depressive episodes in bipolar disorder. Huijbers *et al* (pp. 366–373) trialled discontinuation of maintenance antidepressant medication following completion of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy in a sample of adults with recurrent depression in remission, and found an increased risk of relapse/recurrence in the discontinuation group. The authors comment that, while remitted patients under these circumstances should be advised to stay on medication, those who persist in their wish to discontinue should be supported to do so. A pilot randomised controlled trial of the Healthy Activity Program, a brief psychological treatment with behavioural activation at its core, was conducted in India and a positive impact of the intervention on the prevalence of depression was found. Chowdhary *et al* (pp. 381–388) comment on the potential of their systematic and context-specific approach to the development of the intervention to be applied to other mental disorders. In a UK-based trial of a practice nurse-led proactive care intervention for chronic depression in primary care, Buszewicz *et al* (pp. 374–380) found that the intervention improved levels of functional impairment but there was no improvement in either depression scores or quality of life, except in those engaging in the full intervention. The authors comment on the need to identify those patients, from this neglected clinical group, who are most likely to engage and benefit from such treatment.

Treatment of bipolar type II depression with antidepressant medication is controversial because of the potential problem with manic switch episodes. Amsterdam *et al* (pp. 359–365) compared antidepressant with mood stabiliser monotherapy in a sample of adult out-patients with bipolar II depression. They found that short-term use of venlafaxine produced better outcomes than lithium and did so without an increased risk of hypomania developing. Predictors of recovery from bipolar depression are not well established, nor is the role that such predictors might have in moderating response to treatment. Utilising data from the Systematic Treatment Enhancement Program for Bipolar Disorder (STEP-BD) randomised controlled trial of psychosocial treatment, Stange *et al* (pp. 352–358) examined the role of affective instability on the course of bipolar depression. The degree of instability of symptoms of both depressive and manic type was found to predict a lower likelihood of recovery and a longer time to recovery but did not moderate the effects of the various allocated psychosocial treatments tested. The authors call for further research to understand the role of personality comorbidities, the mechanisms underlying the associations

found, and the extent to which treatments might impact directly on affective instability, as a means to improve recovery from depression.

Mortality and physical health comorbidity in those with mental illness

Using data from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA), White *et al* (pp. 337–342) were able to examine the impact of depressive symptom duration on mortality risk, an aspect of the established link between depression and death which has not been well studied. They found evidence of a dose–response relationship between the duration of symptoms, measured over repeated assessments during follow-up, and mortality. The importance of physical activity, cognitive function, functional impairments and physical illness in explaining the association was considered. In a meta-review of interventions to reduce mortality risk in people with severe mental illness, Baxter *et al* (pp. 322–329) identified 16 systematic reviews, 8 with mortality as the primary outcome. On the basis of their review, the authors call for urgent action in two areas – improving adherence to psychiatric pharmacological guidelines and to guidelines for monitoring metabolic health. They also call for more research to understand the barriers to physical health monitoring and to understand the important ingredients of integrative community care programmes which have been shown to have a positive impact on physical health outcomes.

While those with bipolar disorder and depression are known to have poor physical health outcomes, the impact on cardiometabolic disease specifically is not well understood. Using cross-sectional data from the UK Biobank, Martin *et al* (pp. 343–351) found associations between both disorders and cardiovascular disease outcomes even after adjusting for a range of confounding factors, with risk broadly greater for those with features of bipolar disorder. An association was also found between psychotropic medication and cardiometabolic disease, even among those without a definite history of mood disorder.

Mental illness stigma

The development of stigma theory has occurred largely in a Western context. Angermeyer *et al* (pp. 389–397) sought to compare public beliefs and attitudes about schizophrenia in Germany and Tunisia in order to explore the impact of cultural differences on the social processes underlying stigma. The authors found differences in the form rather than the magnitude of stigma between the two settings – the difference seemed to manifest particularly in those social roles which ‘matter most’ to people in the different settings. In an editorial by Corrigan (pp. 314–315), two key approaches to resolving stigma are considered – promoting normalcy and promoting solidarity. In comparing the pros and cons of the two approaches, Corrigan proposes that future research and advocacy needs to identify which of the approaches should be employed in different circumstances.