

The update of the WPA Educational Programme on the Management of Depressive Disorders

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With the approval of the Executive Committee, the WPA Secretary for Education, A. Tasman, has recently established a Task Force that will review and update the WPA Educational Programme on Depressive Disorders, issued in 1996. The 1996 version of the programme, consisting of four volumes of text with several hundred slides, has been widely used in training psychiatrists and health personnel in other branches of medicine. It has been translated into a number of languages and used as a basis for the production of local training programmes.

Several important developments made it necessary to update this programme. First, it was necessary to clarify the issues of diagnosis and classification of depressive disorders. Recent epidemiological studies, including the World Mental Health Surveys (1), continued to show considerable differences in the prevalence of depressive disorders in different countries. It is likely that most of these differences are due to methodological problems and the imperfections of the diagnostic systems (including differences in delineation of the disorder) currently used in research and practice of psychiatry. On the whole, epidemiological studies indicate that the prevalence of depression is high and increasing; at the same time, there are numerous reports – some produced by groups such as the scientologists and some by other organizations and scientists – stating that the prevalence of depressive disorders is actually stable and that the higher figures are the result of a

collusion between the pharmaceutical industry and the medical profession. The need for a clear and authoritative statement about the diagnosis of depressive disorders – for use in practice, teaching and research – has therefore grown in importance and had to be clearly stated in the WPA programme.

Another reason for the updating of the programme was that, in the period 1996-2006, there were several important additions to knowledge, which had to be reflected in the programme. These were in particular findings about the comorbidity of depression and physical illness, a new understanding of the etiopathogenesis of depression, the confirmation of the contribution of depression to the global burden of illness, new findings about the high prevalence of depressive disorders in disaster stricken populations and new experiences and evidence about depression in the elderly.

Depressive disorders in children have also in recent years become a focus of attention of psychiatrists and of the general public and the media. The recognition of the risk of suicide in young age, the recognition of the continuity of childhood and adulthood depressive disorders as well as the role of depressive disorders in the causation of physical illness have also been listed as reasons for an updating of the programme.

The new version of the programme will consist of five chapters (in brackets are the names of the members of the Task Force with primary responsibility for the text): 1. Overview and fundamental aspects (M. Maj, O. Gureje); 2. Depressive disorders and physical illness (M. Riba); 3. Depressive disorders in older persons (E. Chiu, H. Chiu); 4.

Methods of education about depression (N. Sartorius, D. Goldberg, L. Gask); 5. Depressive disorders in special situations and population groups (M. Maj, O. Gureje, N. Sartorius). Responsible for the overall coordination and review will be N. Sartorius, while A. Tasman will have responsibility for the supervision and linkage to the WPA Executive Committee. Each of the chapters will be accompanied by slides and recommendations for further reading.

The Task Force which is developing the programme includes: N. Sartorius (Co-chairman), A. Tasman (Co-chairman), M. Benyakar, E. Chiu, H. Chiu, S. Douki, L. Gask, D. Goldberg, O. Gureje, S.V. Ivanov, S. Kanba, M. Kasstrup, M. Maj, M. Riba, S. Tyano and D. Wasserman. Substantial contributions to the texts have also been received from: M. Bradley, S. Chaturvedi, F. Cournos, F. Creed, R. Fahrner, L. Grassi, C. Lyketsos, S. Marcus, K. McKinnon, S.R. Vagnhammar and L. Wulsin. Senior Advisers to the project are: J.J. Lopez-Ibor, F. Lieh Mak, E. Paykel and C. Stefanis.

The WPA will make the programme available free of charge in electronic form on its website www.wpanet.org. In addition, it is expected that a printed version will be issued in 2008.

Reference

1. Kessler RC, Angermeyer M, Anthony JC et al. Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of mental disorders in the World Health Organization's World Mental Health Survey Initiative. *World Psychiatry* 2007;6:168-76.