

Bipolar Disorder in the Elderly: Results from a Retrospective Chart Review

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Background: There is an increasing interest in the clinical manifestations and treatment of bipolar disorder among the older adults. The changes in demographics and the introduction of new pharmacological agents are reasons for studying the differential aspects of bipolar disorder in the elderly. Unfortunately there is a lack of data regarding the use of pharmacological agents in this population. This study evaluated the clinical characteristics and routine clinical management of bipolar disorder in an elderly Spanish population, with a special focus on safety and effectiveness of the drugs used.

Methods: The study involved a retrospective follow-up of bipolar patients treated in two Community Mental Health Clinics. Evolution notes should provide enough information for the collecting data on sociodemographic and clinical aspects of the disorder and effectiveness and safety of the different pharmacological agents used during the illness.

Results: Twenty-six patients meeting criteria for DSM-IV bipolar disorder type I (n=12), type II (n=11), bipolar disorder not otherwise specified (n=3), comprised the sample population. The mean age of the sample was 73.88, whereas the mean duration of the illness was 26.55 ± 15.86 years. The mean age of onset of the illness was 45.45.

Ten patients were receiving treatment with lithium, whereas in three patients this mood stabilizer had to be discontinued due to side effects (21.42 %). Other mood stabilizers used implied valproate (n=12, 46%), lamotrigine (n=6, 23.07%), carbamazepine (n=4, 15.38%), topiramate (n=2, 7.69%). Antipsychotics were used frequently for the treatment of manic or hypomanic breakthroughs or even as maintenance treatment. Two patients were treated with antipsychotics as mood stabilizer.

Conclusions: Lithium was generally well tolerated, although used in lower dosages. On the other hand, the clinical use of other mood stabilizers and antipsychotics was very similar to younger populations.