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## Diagnosis and treatment of bipolar disorders in adults: a review of the evidence on pharmacologic treatments.

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### Abstract

**BACKGROUND:** Patients with bipolar disorder are exceptionally challenging to manage because of the dynamic, chronic, and fluctuating nature of their disease. Typically, the symptoms of bipolar disorder first appear in adolescence or early adulthood, and are repeated over the patient's lifetime, expressed as unpredictable recurrences of hypomanic/manic or depressive episodes. The lifetime prevalence of bipolar disorder in adults is reported to be approximately 4%, and its management was estimated to cost the US healthcare system in 2009 \$150 billion in combined direct and indirect costs.

**OBJECTIVE:** To review the published literature and describe the personal and societal burdens associated with bipolar disorder, the impact of delays in accurate diagnosis, and the evidence for the clinical effectiveness of available pharmacologic therapies.

**METHODS:** The studies in this comprehensive review were selected for inclusion based on clinical relevance, importance, and robustness of data related to diagnosis and treatment of bipolar disorder. The search terms that were initially used on MEDLINE/PubMed and Google Scholar were restricted to 1994 through 2014 and included "bipolar disorder," "mania," "bipolar depression," "mood stabilizer," "atypical antipsychotics," and "antidepressants." High-quality, recent reviews of major relevant topics were included to supplement the primary studies.

**DISCUSSION:** Substantial challenges facing patients with bipolar disorder, in addition to their severe mood symptoms, include frequent incidence of psychiatric (eg, anxiety disorders, alcohol or drug dependence) and general medical comorbidities (eg, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity, migraine, and hepatitis C virus infection). It has been reported that more than 75% of patients take their medication less than 75% of the time, and the rate of suicide (0.4%) among patients with bipolar disorder is more than 20 times greater than in the general US population. Mood stabilizers are the cornerstone of treatment of bipolar disorder, but atypical antipsychotics are broadly as effective; however, differences in efficacy exist between individual agents in the treatment of the various phases of bipolar disorder, including treatment of acute mania or acute depression symptoms, and in the prevention of relapse.

**CONCLUSION:** The challenges involved in managing bipolar disorder over a patient's lifetime are the result of the dynamic, chronic, and fluctuating nature of this disease. Diligent selection of a treatment that takes into account its efficacy in the various phases of the disorder, along with the safety profile identified in clinical trials and in the real world can help ameliorate the impact of this devastating condition.

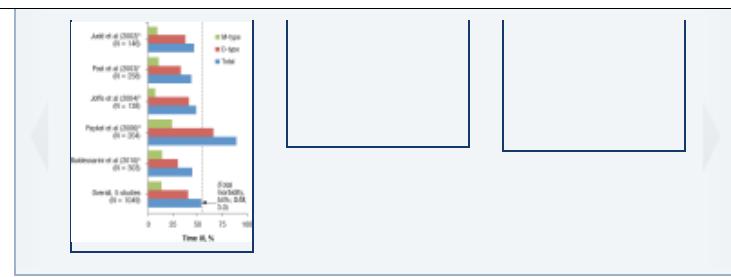
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