

Forum Description: The Multidisciplinary Treatment of Eating Disorders

The proposed forum has the purpose of finding multidisciplinary and collaborative approaches and solutions to working with eating disorders in neurotypical and atypical populations. The aim is to provide a general understanding of eating disorders, treatment options and how to overcome current challenges to treatment and recovery. Other themes include:

- How do we ensure that the first contact with healthcare is positive? Especially in primary care settings
- How do maximize the use of alternatives to specialized eating disorder care?
- How do we ensure professionals, families, friends and patients are best supported within the available healthcare?
- Understanding avoidant and restrictive patterns of eating often seen in the autistic population and what the best options for intervention and treatment are
- Understanding the influence of social media and online communities (e.g. pro-ana) and finding ways to reduce the need for and risk associated with them

The forum is for anyone working with or caring for someone with an eating disorder as well as individuals with an eating disorder. We invite speakers from all disciplines as well as people using or requiring healthcare services for eating disorders to share their understanding, knowledge and experience. Working within a multidisciplinary approach is crucial for all psychiatric disorders and therefore we invite you to take part in the discussion on how to ensure people with eating disorders are heard, understood and receive the best care possible.

The treatment of eating disorders is challenging due to a variety of factors including poor understanding of the disorders, resistance and characteristic features of the disorders, comorbidity and a lack of resources available in healthcare. Elements of treatment that are known to be helpful are having strong knowledge and understanding (compassion) for eating disorders, creating an empathetic yet firm alliance with patients and involving relevant health professionals, family/ friends and the patient in care.

Evidence has shown that a prompt diagnosis and early intervention improve recovery prospects but eating disorders are notoriously difficult to diagnose and treat. This is exacerbated by the fact that there is a general lack of understanding, knowledge and skill in dealing with, treating and appropriately referring people with eating disorders within primary care services (or at the first point of contact).

Professionals, families and patients tend to agree that specialist services are the gold standard for eating disorder treatment. However, there are long waiting lists, a lack of resources and no guarantee of admission and/ or treatment by specialist services. If the emphasis is solely on specialist care, other agencies including primary care become stepping stones rather than potential alternatives. Research has found that a positive first experience has a significant impact on the recovery trajectory and therefore primary care should be viewed as an opportunity for an effective alternative treatment rather than a barrier or obstacle to the treatment of eating disorders. Treatment has the potential to be successful when the patient develops internal motivation or a desire for help, which is influenced by their experience of primary care. It has been widely recommended that a well-validated universal screening protocol for eating disorders is needed. This would help professionals working in primary care to build understanding and confidence and would allow individuals with eating disorders to feel safer and heard which can be a powerful catalyst for the desire to change.

As with all psychiatric conditions, professionals need to be available, consistent, respectful, empathetic and have the ability to build a positive therapeutic alliance with the patient. Treatment should be a partnership between stakeholders involving sharing knowledge, skills and best treatment options. Professionals should move from a place of power and authority to one of support and encouragement to improve outcomes with the entire team working together in the recovery process.

Furthermore, eating disorders must be viewed in the context of sociocultural factors and the impact of the media, social media and pro-anorexia/ pro-bulimia (pro-ana/pro-mia) content. Families, friends and schools must be part of the conversation around eating disorders. There is a need to understand the appeal of pro-ana/ pro-mia content and groups with an emphasis on

finding a solution that can replace the need for involvement in pro-ana/ pro-mia groups/ communities. It poses a significant risk and a barrier to treatment yet provides support and a sense of belonging to the person and is therefore a complex issue that requires multidisciplinary input and the involvement of families/ carers and service users.

Eating disorders or avoidant and restrictive eating patterns are common features of autism. There is a need for professionals in primary and secondary care to have a better understanding of the presentation of eating disorders within the autistic population. This forum aims to increase the understanding of the core features of eating disorders in the context of the developmental characteristics of individuals on the autism spectrum and what the best treatment options are.

Sources

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