

452 Psychiatric Disorders

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Psychiatric disorders are common in medical practice and may present either as a primary disorder or as a comorbid condition. The prevalence of mental or substance use disorders in the United States is ~30%, but only one-third of affected individuals are currently receiving treatment. Global burden of disease statistics indicates that 4 of the 10 most important causes of morbidity and attendant health care costs worldwide are psychiatric in origin.

Changes in health care delivery underscore the need for primary care physicians to assume responsibility for the initial diagnosis and treatment of the most common mental disorders. Prompt diagnosis is essential to ensure that patients have access to appropriate medical services and to maximize the clinical outcome. Validated patient-based questionnaires have been developed that systematically probe for signs and symptoms associated with the most prevalent psychiatric diagnoses and guide the clinician into targeted assessment. The Primary Care Evaluation of Mental Disorders (PRIME-MD; and a self-report form, the Patient Health Questionnaire) and the Symptom-Driven Diagnostic System for Primary Care (SDDS-PC) are inventories that require only 10 min to complete and link patient responses to the formal diagnostic criteria of anxiety, mood, somatoform, and eating disorders and to alcohol abuse or dependence. A variety of smart phone apps for assessment and monitoring of psychiatric conditions and for psychological and pharmacologic treatment interventions are also available.

A physician who refers patients to a psychiatrist should know not only when doing so is appropriate but also how to refer because societal misconceptions and the stigma of mental illness impede the process. Primary care physicians should base referrals to a psychiatrist on the presence of signs and symptoms of a mental disorder and not simply on the absence of a physical explanation for