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July Disease Focus

Focus on Pharmacotherapy for Depression

Each year approximately 21 million Americans suffer a major depressive episode, or about 16% of the population. The lifetime prevalence of depression in women is 10-25% and 5-12% for men. First-degree relatives of patients with depression are 1.5-3 times more likely to develop depression. Unfortunately, up to 15% of depressed patients will attempt suicide; thus, prompt recognition and effective treatment for depression is critical. In addition to suicidal ideation, other symptoms of depression include anhedonia (loss of interest in pleasurable activities), feelings of guilt and hopelessness, decline in energy and appetite, difficulty concentrating, psychomotor changes and insomnia.

The exact pathogenesis and etiology of depression is unknown, and cannot be explained by a single sociological, developmental, or biological theory. Dysregulation of neurotransmitter systems, such as serotonin and norepinephrine are likely to be involved. Other neurotransmitters implicated include dopamine, glutamate, and brain-derived neurotrophic factor. Some medications may exacerbate and even induce



depression in susceptible individuals. This includes centrally-acting antihypertensives, such as clonidine, reserpine, methylopa, varenicline, corticosteroids, interferons, and CNS depressants. Psychosocial risk factors for depression may also play a role, especially for depression that develops later in life. Such factors include impaired social supports, caregiver burden, loneliness, bereavement, and adverse life events.

Patients who are depressed often initially receive non-pharmacological treatment, with or without medications. Examples include cognitive-behavioral therapy, interpersonal therapy, psychoanalysis, family therapy, insight training, light therapy (for seasonal affective disorder) and electroconvulsant therapy (for refractory cases). Additionally patients should use self-help techniques, support groups, prayer, meditation, aerobic exercise and relaxation methods as part of a comprehensive approach to treating depression. Most patients with depression will also need pharmacotherapy for effective treatment. A wide variety of antidepressant classes are available.

Read More: <http://www.pharmacychoice.com/education/diseases/depression.cfm?disease=depression>