



The links between mental and physical health

Recommendation by patients

Rebecca Müller, Secretary-General of GAMIAN-Europe

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GAMIAN REGIONAL SEMINAR – LARNACA – 03/06/2012

- The second day of the GAMIAN Regional Seminar in Larnaca on 3rd of June 2012 was consecrated to the links between physical and mental health
- 25 patients from up to 14 different countries exchanged their views and experiences regarding this subject
- Patients from Cyprus, France, Israel, Italy, Greece, Lithuania and Portugal presented their own experiences
- Testimonials and exchange of experience

GAMIAN PATIENT SURVEY FINDINGS

PATIENT TESTIMONIALS – A SNAPSHOT

“For lots of years I could not have a family doctor. (...) **There is a shortage of family doctors in Portugal.**”

Pedro, Portugal

“**Earlier help could be given** to patients with a mental illness . It shouldn't be that you spend a year gaining weight, become deeply unhappy, stop taking their medication and then **relapse**”

Rebecca, Belgium

“They never believed that my physical problem was real because I was a mental health patient.(...) **There's no one to explain** the side effects of medication to patients. My GP only spends 20 minutes with patients because of the system in France ”

Patrick, France

“As soon as I started medication, I gained 10 kilos. It was side effect of the medication but **I was never told** by my psychiatrist. “

Rebecca, Belgium

I did not have a physical health check before age **41.** “

Pedro, Portugal

Conclusions and Recommendations

- 1. Better communication between GP and Psychiatrists** is needed and should be promoted -> suggestion: introduction of a case manager to centralise all information regarding the treatment path of the patient (physical, mental, social).
- 2. Better training of professionals** to increase awareness of the link between physical and mental health issues (For example: training of GP and Psychiatrists).

Conclusions and Recommendations

- 3. Patients need clear and honest information** on the physical side effects of the medication they need to take for their mental health problem (weight gain - diabetes, cholesterol – increased smoking, tremors, and sexual problems).
- 4. Professionals should pay enough attention to the physical side effects** and should do everything possible to reduce them as this will contribute to the quality of life of the patients.

Conclusions and Recommendations

5. **Remove the barriers** to get help for physical problems:
 - financial reasons (consultation fee of GP)
 - stigma (patients do not want the GP to know about their psychiatric problems)

6. Patients have to take good care of themselves: take responsibility and assume their part in the treatment, within the **therapeutic alliance between patients and professionals.**

GAMIAN EUROPE = THE VOICE OF THE PATIENT

- **Stigma** clearly plays a role in the lack of awareness and attention consecrated to the link between mental and physical health.
- **Mental health professionals**, but also patients and their family members should be more aware of this issue and address it.
- Patients have a **right to clear information about their illness/health**.
-> **As a patient you need to be in charge of your own rehabilitation process.**
TIPS for patients: ask questions regarding your treatment. Speak openly with your psychiatrist about your medication and address side effects that diminish your life quality. Get a second opinion if needed.

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TIPS for patients: ask questions regarding your treatment. Speak openly with your psychiatrist about your medication and address side effects that diminish your life quality. Get a second opinion if needed.
- Need for a **therapeutic alliance** between patients and professionals.