

A New Era of Treatment for Anxiety and Depression

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The World Health Report 2001 from the World Health Organization indicates that one in five persons suffer from some kind of mental and behavioural disorders in their life time. Although effective treatment exists for these disorders, a number of barriers have prevented most people from gaining access to care. One of these is the lack of public awareness and inadequate training of primary care doctors in the modern management of mood disorders. Mood disorders in the form of anxiety and depression manifest as a constellation of somatic and psychological symptoms and can lead to significant suffering, functional impairment, and even mortality by suicide. Most of these patients first approach general practitioners with unexplained somatic complaints, but good history taking will readily reveal the mood, cognitive and behavioural symptoms of mood disorders. Because of the limited number of specialist psychiatrists who have to focus on the care of severe mental disorders, family doctors in primary care represent a most important health care sector in which patients with mood disorders can receive effective treatment with little fear of stigmatization. Instead of potentially addictive tranquillizers and analgesics, the modern approach to the management of mood disorders consists of specific serotonergic and/or noradrenergic modulators of the central nervous system or cognitive behavioral psychotherapy. Since these medications have a delayed onset of action and can cause initial side effects, adequate psychoeducation and a good doctor-patient relationship are vital in bringing out complete remission. Simple stress management techniques are also an important adjunctive mode of treatment. Treatment of mood disorders is not only feasible but can bring about substantial job satisfaction to primary care doctors. A model of education for both the general public and primary care doctors at the Hong Kong Mood Disorders Center is discussed.