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BIPOLAR DISORDERS Factsheet

November 2021

What is treatment resistance?

Bipolar disorder is a persistent, episodic and debilitating condition associated with recurring episodes of mania, hypomania, depression, and mixed manic-depressive states. These symptoms can lead to severe functional impairment, substance abuse, and suicidal behaviour. Treatment guidelines advocate the use of individual medications, with multiple medications indicated when a patient relapses on maintenance treatment. Unsatisfactory response to therapies is common in bipolar disorder, particularly during depression episodes. Hence, there is a need to study medications that specifically target people with treatment resistance.

What is the evidence for treatment-resistant bipolar disorder?

Moderate quality evidence finds the dopamine agonist pramipexole added to standard mood stabilisers can improve treatment-resistant bipolar depression. There may also be some improvement with the mood stabilisers modafinil or armodafinil. A single infusion of ketamine can improve depression one day after infusion, but is not sustained by two weeks after infusion.

Moderate to low quality evidence suggests clozapine and triiodothyronine may be effective for treatment-resistant bipolar disorder, including mania symptoms with clozapine, although the side effects of clozapine require careful monitoring.

For more information see the technical table



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NeuRA (Neuroscience Research Australia) is one of the largest independent medical and clinical research institutes in Australia and an international leader in neurological research.

Diseases of the brain and nervous system pose the greatest health, economic and social burden of any disease group because they are chronic, debilitating and have no known cures.

Medical research is the cornerstone of efforts to advance the health and wellbeing of families and the community. Our dedicated scientists are focussed on transforming their research into significant and practical benefits for all patients.

While we hope you find this information useful, it is always important to discuss any questions about bipolar disorder or its treatment with your doctor or other health care provider.

HOW YOUR SUPPORT HELPS

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