Patients with anxiety and depression wanted to know what to expect when they started their medication


How do mental health problems and treatment of these problems affect working life?

**MAIN FINDINGS**

Participants shared how their families, friends, or colleagues often recognised their depression or anxiety symptoms first. Typically, participants were unaware until a crisis occurred. Symptoms included nausea, headache, dizziness, trembling, lack of energy, tiredness, lack of concentration, extremes of emotion, and lack of motivation. Sleep patterns were disturbed, which perpetuated the feeling of tiredness. Most respondents felt that their work performance was impaired: they were indecisive, unable to concentrate, and unproductive. Effects of prescribed medication. Drug side effects were similar to anxiety and depression symptoms (ie, confusion, dizziness, nausea, and difficulties with decision making). Participants described feeling distant and dislocated. Sometimes anxiety symptoms were exacerbated by the medication. Non-compliance with medication. Participants often took less than the prescribed amount or discontinued use altogether because their symptoms initially worsened or did not improve. Some experienced symptoms when they forgot to take their drugs or stopped treatment, which made them fear addiction or dependence. Participants who found the medication helpful worried about psychological dependency. Generally, participants did not like taking medication and would often stop once their symptoms began to improve. Patient information. Some participants found their GPs helpful. Many, however, found that they were not given enough information about side effects. The leaflets accompanying medications were frightening and unhelpful. Participants also had differing ideas about how long the medication needed to take effect and the importance of taking medication every day. Participants admitted to hospital found that hospital staff could take the time to explain fully what to expect from medication. Self help groups were also good sources of information. The expert panel felt that GPs needed to “sell” the benefits of medication and explain how patients might feel heightened anxiety initially. Patient monitoring. The expert panel felt that compliance was not as great a problem with more recent drugs. They also thought that lack of compliance was most problematic in the early stages of treatment, when patients may feel worse, and later on when they start to feel better. Most participants reported that their drug prescriptions were reviewed on a regular basis. Participants valued consistency in treatment. Sometimes they felt that GPs were not familiar with the medication or range of services. When referred to see a specialist, they felt that treatment options and possible causes of their illness were more fully discussed. Access to services varied among participants.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Patients with anxiety and depression felt that their work performance was impaired by their symptoms and drug side effects. They felt less informed and needed more information to help them know what to expect so that they did not discontinue drugs prematurely.

**METHODS**

Each focus group session (approximately 90 min) was audiotaped and transcribed. Transcripts were analysed by sorting verbatim material into emergent themes using Knodel’s method. An expert panel reviewed the findings to discuss implications for practice.

**DESIGN**

Qualitative study using focus groups.

**SETTING**

Leicestershire, UK.

**PATIENTS**

12 focus groups, 9 groups of patients who had anxiety and/or depression in the previous 2 years and used medication (6 groups: 35 patients [28–60 y, 63% women] from various work sectors; 3 groups: 19 patients [18–63 y, 74% women] attending anxiety management courses). 3 groups of 20 staff who had responsibility for human resources, personnel, and occupational health and safety (age not reported, 65% women).

**Q** Have you had problems related to taking your medication?

**A** Participants shared how their families, friends, or colleagues often recognised their depression or anxiety symptoms first. Typically, participants were unaware until a crisis occurred. Symptoms included nausea, headache, dizziness, trembling, lack of energy, tiredness, lack of concentration, extremes of emotion, and lack of motivation. Sleep patterns were disturbed, which perpetuated the feeling of tiredness. Most respondents felt that their work performance was impaired: they were indecisive, unable to concentrate, and unproductive.

**Q** How do you feel when taking medication?

**A** Participants described feeling distant and dislocated. Sometimes anxiety symptoms were exacerbated by the medication.

**Q** Have your family members ever noticed any changes in your behaviour?

**A** Participants shared how their families, friends, or colleagues often recognised their depression or anxiety symptoms first. Typically, participants were unaware until a crisis occurred. Symptoms included nausea, headache, dizziness, trembling, lack of energy, tiredness, lack of concentration, extremes of emotion, and lack of motivation. Sleep patterns were disturbed, which perpetuated the feeling of tiredness.

**Q** Do you feel you have adequate information to understand how your medication works?

**A** Participants shared how their families, friends, or colleagues often recognised their depression or anxiety symptoms first. Typically, participants were unaware until a crisis occurred. Symptoms included nausea, headache, dizziness, trembling, lack of energy, tiredness, lack of concentration, extremes of emotion, and lack of motivation. Sleep patterns were disturbed, which perpetuated the feeling of tiredness. Most respondents felt that their work performance was impaired: they were indecisive, unable to concentrate, and unproductive.

**Q** Do you feel you have adequate information to understand your illness?

**A** Participants shared how their families, friends, or colleagues often recognised their depression or anxiety symptoms first. Typically, participants were unaware until a crisis occurred. Symptoms included nausea, headache, dizziness, trembling, lack of energy, tiredness, lack of concentration, extremes of emotion, and lack of motivation. Sleep patterns were disturbed, which perpetuated the feeling of tiredness. Most respondents felt that their work performance was impaired: they were indecisive, unable to concentrate, and unproductive.

**Q** Have you had problems related to taking your medication?

**A** Participants shared how their families, friends, or colleagues often recognised their depression or anxiety symptoms first. Typically, participants were unaware until a crisis occurred. Symptoms included nausea, headache, dizziness, trembling, lack of energy, tiredness, lack of concentration, extremes of emotion, and lack of motivation. Sleep patterns were disturbed, which perpetuated the feeling of tiredness. Most respondents felt that their work performance was impaired: they were indecisive, unable to concentrate, and unproductive.
Patients with anxiety and depression wanted to know what to expect when they started their medication

*Evid Based Nurs* 2005 8: 27
doi: 10.1136/ebn.8.1.27

Updated information and services can be found at:
http://ebn.bmj.com/content/8/1/27

**References**

This article cites 2 articles, 1 of which you can access for free at:
http://ebn.bmj.com/content/8/1/27#BIBL

**Email alerting service**

Receive free email alerts when new articles cite this article. Sign up in the box at the top right corner of the online article.

**Topic Collections**

Articles on similar topics can be found in the following collections

Stroke (219)
Anxiety disorders (including OCD and PTSD) (14)
Drugs: musculoskeletal and joint diseases (152)
Headache (including migraine) (29)
Health education (333)
Pain (neurology) (312)
Occupational and environmental medicine (20)

**Notes**

To request permissions go to:
http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions

To order reprints go to:
http://journals.bmj.com/cgi/reprintform

To subscribe to BMJ go to:
http://group.bmj.com/subscribe/