

Treatment Patterns Among Patients with Bipolar Disorder in the United States: A Retrospective Claims Database Analysis

The purpose of this article was to evaluate real world treatment patterns among patients newly diagnosed with bipolar disorder in the United States and determine how closely current prescribing practices align with evidence based treatment guidelines. The authors sought to better understand which medications are most commonly prescribed for bipolar disorder and how treatment regimens change over time in routine clinical practice.

The researchers in this study analyzed data from the IBM MarketScan Commercial Claims Database and identified 40,345 adults newly diagnosed with bipolar disorder between 2016 and 2018. Patients were followed for at least 12 months before diagnosis and 6 months after diagnosis. The study examined patterns of medication use across multiple types of therapy, including mood stabilizers, atypical antipsychotics, antidepressants, benzodiazepines, stimulants, and other psychotropic medications. They also evaluated the frequency of treatment changes and the diversity of prescribing regimens.

The study found that approximately 90% of patients received pharmacologic treatment, and nearly 80% required at least one additional line of therapy, demonstrating the complexity and chronic nature of bipolar disorder. Mood stabilizers were the most commonly prescribed medications, followed closely by antidepressants and atypical antipsychotics. The authors identified over 2,000 unique treatment regimens, indicating substantial variability in clinical practice. They also noted that antidepressants and benzodiazepines were frequently prescribed despite guideline recommendations that caution against antidepressant monotherapy in many patients with bipolar disorder.

This article is relevant to my patient, a 36 year old male presenting with symptoms suggestive of bipolar disorder. He describes a history of prolonged depressive episodes alternating with periods of elevated mood characterized by impulsive spending, risky business decisions, infidelity, decreased judgement, and significant financial consequences. Despite these symptoms, he has only been treated with sertraline prescribed by his primary care provider. The findings from this study highlight the importance of accurately diagnosing bipolar disorder and utilizing guideline directed treatment, including mood stabilizers or atypical antipsychotics, rather than relying solely on antidepressant therapy. The evidence supports the need for comprehensive psychiatric evaluation and appropriate medication management to reduce the risk of future mood episodes and improve long term outcomes for this patient.

Reference

Jain, R., Kong, A. M., Gillard, P., & Harrington, A. (2022). Treatment patterns among patients with bipolar disorder in the United States: A retrospective claims database analysis. *Advances in Therapy*, 39(6), 2578-2595. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12325-022-02112-6>