

Lilly continues to invest in overall health of patients suffering from psychotic conditions – reached R1 million mark

Patients taking antipsychotic medications, at risk of weight gain, offered additional lifestyle assistance

Recognising the need to further educate and assist people suffering from psychotic conditions such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder to live healthier lives, leading pharmaceutical company, Eli Lilly, has been offering the "Lilly Wellness Plus" programme to patients since March 2006.

Partnering with Virgin Life Care, this patient programme is designed to enable healthcare professionals to help their patients' live healthier lifestyles. The premise of the programme is to motivate its customers to get moving, to eat more healthy and to live life with greater vigour. "Our mission is to motivate South Africans to take control of their personal health by providing customised services and comprehensive tools in which to do so", says (Andrew Milne from Virgin Life Care).

One of the side effects of patients taking antipsychotic medication is that they can gain weight from the medication. The need to provide some form of lifestyle management for patients with schizophrenia is now universally accepted.

Evidence suggests that schizophrenia patients may have a genetic predisposition to developing certain metabolic abnormalities and this liability is exacerbated by the typically unhealthy lifestyle of most schizophrenia sufferers.¹

Similarly, obesity is a particular concern in the management of patients with bipolar disorder since antipsychotic drugs, mood stabilizers and many antidepressant medications are all associated with weight gain. Obesity is a risk factor for metabolic syndrome, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and some cancers.²

The life expectancy for individuals with schizophrenia is around 20% shorter than the life expectancy for the general population. Approximately two-thirds of this mortality is thought to result from physical health problems.¹

The need to prevent or reverse weight gain cannot be separated from the need to improve other aspects of lifestyle relevant to a reduction in cardiovascular disease e.g. increase exercise levels, decrease smoking and improve diet. Even relatively small weight losses offer health benefits. A weight loss of just 5% of body weight in obese individuals may result in clinically meaningful reductions in morbidity and mortality.¹

Lilly has recognised that pressure placed on healthcare professionals today can often prevent them from being able to dedicate adequate time to helping their patients follow individualised dietary and exercise programmes. The Lilly Wellness Plus programme is a completely confidential service to patients, in addition to their psychiatrist's current treatment options and consultations, and is fully supported by Lilly by the way of sponsorships. In the 18 months since inception, Lilly has invested over R1 million in this initiative.

Virgin Life Care is an independent, scientific company

specialising in the development of individualised health management programmes through personalised exercise, meal planning and lifestyle prescription.

The Lilly Wellness Plus programme is a 12-month programme involving well structured, personalised eating plans and exercise programmes designed specifically for each patient. The service includes unlimited access to professional biokineticists and dieticians and combined coaching and counselling via the telephone, e-mail and / or the web.

"It has become increasingly evident that drug therapy alone won't serve the needs of patients suffering with psychotic illness. Other important non-drug interventions such as exercise, health and dietary advice are needed. Lilly has considered and researched these needs and, has learned that it takes specialised expertise to make a notable difference in the lives of psychotic patients," explains Jacques Blaauw, Marketing Director for Lilly South Africa. "Through our partnership with Virgin Life Care, drug efficacy and tolerability can combine to improve patient functioning and help achieve better treatment outcomes," he says.

The massive scourge of western lifestyles, namely eating too much fast food coupled with poor exercise regimes, means that these patients need to adopt a holistic approach to their wellbeing, which focuses on controlling their mental condition as well as healthy eating and appropriate exercising. Stopping antipsychotic medication is not an option for these patients, since the risk of relapse is often devastating.

"This programme is tremendous. Firstly, many patients on anti-psychotic drugs suffer from schizophrenia which is a terrible mental condition affecting drive and ambition. This programme is excellent as it is an active intervention, primarily driven telephonically, whereby professionals such as dieticians and biokineticists will try to motivate patients to find and live as healthy lives as possible," comments Pretoria Psychiatrist, Dr Franco Colin. "Secondly, one side effect of being on an anti-psychotic medication can be weight gain, and this type of programme will help patients keep this in check," he says.

More than 1070 patients have been touched by the program with 330 active members currently on the Lilly Wellness Plus Programme. The programme has shown an 82% success rate for enrolled referrals.

References

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2. Morriss R, Mohammed FA. Metabolism, lifestyle and bipolar affective disorder. *Journal of Psychopharmacology* 19(6) Supplement (2005) 94-101 2005.