Adjusting to the Diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder

The Role of an Online Psycho-education Program

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Investigators

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The Question…..

- Internet interventions involving some professional support are associated with better adherence and outcomes.

- Are we over-supporting our interventions?

- Can the support function be effectively performed by non-professionals to address problems of cost and large-scale dissemination?

The Problem…..

■ When diagnosed with bipolar disorder, many people go through a period of shock, disbelief and/or denial.

■ Poor treatment adherence, inadequate self management, increased levels of disability are common.

■ Once diagnosis is accepted, pts start to develop helpful illness perceptions and strategies to control BD.

■ How to assist patients to adjust to and accept their diagnosis, and self-manage their condition?

Bipolar Disorder Education Program

Bipolar Education Program Modules
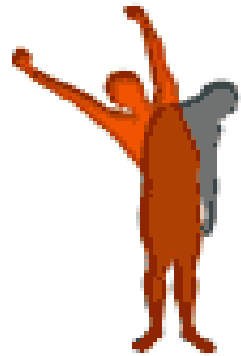
The causes of Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar Disorder medications

Psychological treatments for Bipolar Disorder

Staying well with a stay well plan

Issues for carers

Omega-3 as a treatment for Bipolar Disorder

Person first, illness last

Conclusion

Online Bipolar Education Program

1. **Diagnosing Bipolar Disorder** (BP1 & BPII symptoms, signs and illness trajectories)

2. **Causes of Bipolar disorder** (genetic and environmental)

3. **Medications**

4. **Psychological Treatments**

5. **Stay-Well Plans** (identifying triggers and early warning signs, and designing preemptive actions involving pt and family)

6. **Carers and Support Networks**

7. **Omega-3 as a treatment for depression**

8. **Person First Illness Last**

Online Bipolar Education Program

Components:

- Presentation of information
- Interviews with experts
- Personal testimonies from well-known Australians with bipolar disorder

Multi-media channels:

- Graphics
- Audio
- Text

Public Access Data

- 8000 visitors in 6 months
- 70% from Aust, 30% from USA
- Average completion rate of modules = 76%
- Mini study of new visitors to site:
  - 76% female
  - 11->80 years
  - 44% with bipolar disorder (of whom 49% diagnosed within previous 12 mths)

Research Question

Does a 8-module online education program + TAU for Bipolar Disorder improve psycho-social adjustment in adults with newly-diagnosed (≤ 12 mths) Bipolar Disorder

With and without email support from an informed carer.

In comparison with an attention control condition.

Interventions

1

2

Bipolar Disorder Education Program (BEP)

Email support from an informed carer

+

Control

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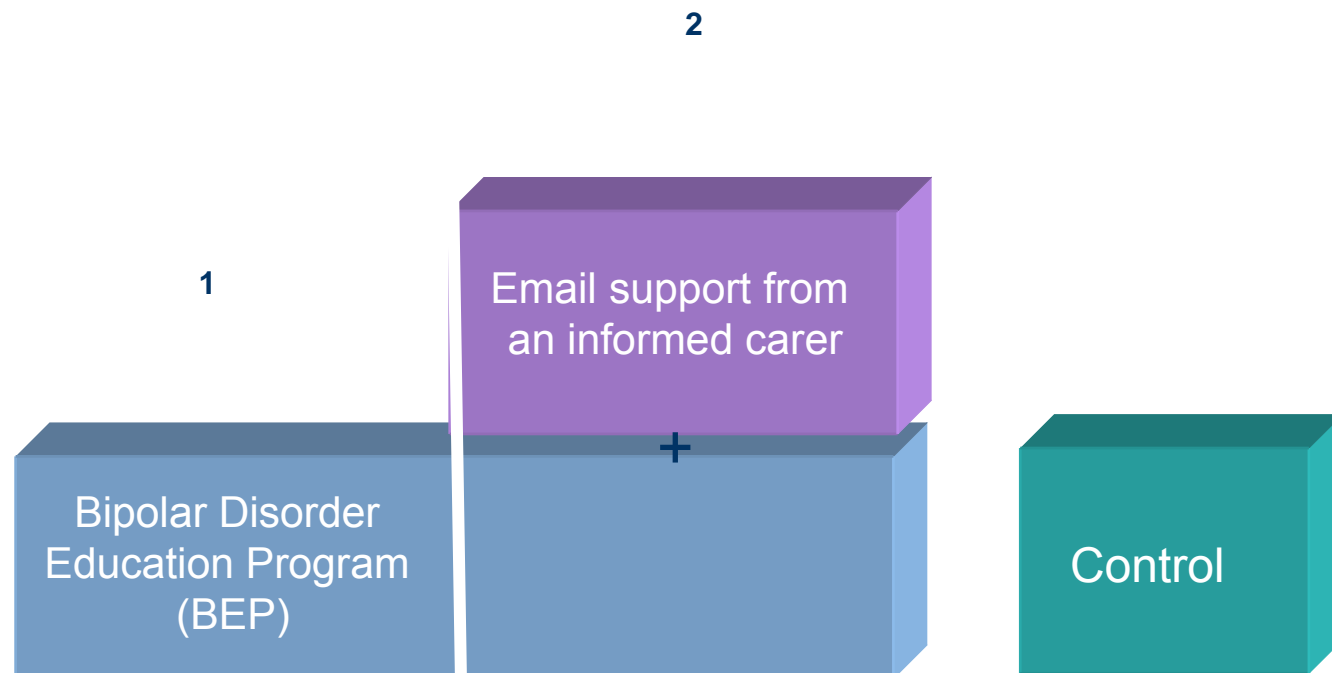
Online Bipolar Education Research

- One online module per week over 8 weeks

- Workbook activities to assist participants to apply the information and strategies to their situation

- Self-monitoring between sessions

Informed Supporters

- People with bipolar disorder

- Effectively managing their condition for >2 years

- Trained to provide email support for the education program under supervision of our clinical team.

Informed Support

- At least one and maximum two emails per week sent to each participant (max 300 words per email), with invitation to respond.

- Practical advice about how to set up a "well-being plan" (strategies to minimise risks and illness triggers and a contingency plan for times when unwell) as well as general issues about bipolar disorder.

- Emails from Informed Supporters are checked for adherence and safety.

- Emails from participants to Informed Supporters are monitored for adverse events.

Attention Control

- Weekly emails containing general information about bipolar disorder + monitoring

Inclusion Criteria:

- >18 years
- Diagnosed with BD in previous 12 months
- Currently receiving regular care from psychiatrist or GP
- Has access to internet and printer, and is computer literate
- Able to read and write English
- Living in Australia

Screening

- Bipolar Disorder Assessment Test (Parker et al., 2006)

Outcome variables

- Illness perception (understanding, control, stigma)
- Work and social adjustment
- Self esteem
- Health locus of control
- Life satisfaction
- Health status (symptoms, functional limitations, distress)
- Knowledge about bipolar disorder
- Health care utilisation (medication compliance, visits to practitioners, hospital admissions)
- Satisfaction with intervention

Measures

- Illness Perception Questionnaire (Broadbent et al., 2006)
- Work & Social Adjustment Scale (Mundt et al., 2002)
- Daily Mood and Functioning Chart (Parker et al., 2006)
- Goldberg Anxiety & Depression Scale (Goldberg et al., 1988)
- Rosenberg Self Esteem Inventory (Rosenberg, 1965)
- Life Satisfaction Scale (Diener et al, 1985)
- Multi-dimensional Health Locus of Control Scale (Wallston, 2005)
- Bipolar Disorder Literacy Quiz (designed for this study)
- Health service usage (self-report)

Measurement Points

- Baseline

- Post-intervention

- 3-months post-intervention

- 6-months post-intervention

Qualitative Analysis of Participants' Emails

Predominant themes:

■ ## Difficulty coping with symptoms (n=11):
"I am currently in a mixed episode that feels really strange. I feel wired and have a racing mind but also depressive thoughts. Have you experienced a mixed episode?".
"Sounds like you have tamed the highs and lows you've had – how have you done this?"

■ ## Medication (n=9):
"I have tried a lot of different medications already and am wondering if there really is one that will work for me…and how well it will work….will I still have ups and downs?"

■ ## Reaction to diagnosis (n=6):
"I was diagnosed about 7 months ago and I feel I am partly in denial, even though I know that my moods are extreme and I can see myself in what I read about bipolar (and I trust my doctor)"

Qualitative Analysis (cont)

- ## Identifying early warning signs and triggers (n=4):
  "I know what I'm like when I'm depressed and when I'm on a high, however the triggers are really difficult for me to identify. I generally feel myself going downhill, but it's so quick.

- ## Uncertainty about the future (n=4):
  "What does this mean for my life? Can I lead a normal life?"

- ## Stigma (n=4):
  "I don't know who to tell that I have bipolar disorder. I told a friend over a week ago and I have not heard from her since. I feel really angry about this because I expected to have her support."

- ## Who am I? (n=4)
  "My biggest issue is coming to terms with the "loss" of who I am. Sometimes I feel I cannot be the person I once thought I was."