Preface

Women’s Mental Health: Progress and Realities

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Editors

The field of women’s mental health has grown tremendously over the past several decades. Some of the growth in this area has been related to a national focus on health care, with particular attention to conditions specific to women, sex and gender differences, and reproductive rights. Federal agencies have put policies in place about research requiring consideration of sex in study design, recruitment, and analysis, and clinicians have begun to implement aspects of personalized medicine, which may change for women across the life cycle. The knowledge base has grown considerably and has expanded into new areas, such as female sexual dysfunction, with the first medical treatment approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 2015. Progress in the diagnostic classification of disorders in women is evident in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Fifth Edition) (DSM-5), which for the first time includes premenstrual dysphoric disorder in the main text as well as the mood disorder specifier “with perinatal onset.” New data regarding sex and gender differences in prevalence, cause, presentation, interventions, and response to treatment are impacting care of women and stimulating new research. A medication with a new mechanism of action (positive allosteric neuromodulator) and a unique treatment paradigm (brief intravenous infusion) with a specific indication for postpartum depression has just been approved. Organizations and conferences on women’s mental health are increasing in number and providing more opportunities for clinicians and researchers to share their knowledge, such as the 8th World Congress on Women’s Mental Health this year in Paris.

This issue begins with a summary by Margaret Altemus of the latest science concerning neuroendocrine networks and functionality. She discusses the developmental
and cyclic changes in hormonal exposures in women that can impact brain function and mental health. This sets the stage for several articles related to reproductive mood disorders. Teresa Lanza di Scalea and Teri Pearlstein provide an overview of premenstrual dysphoric disorder; Jennifer Payne presents the newest guidelines for psychotropic use during pregnancy and breastfeeding, and Claudio Soares discusses the evaluation and treatment of depression related to the menopause transition.

A brand new diagnosis in the DSM-5 is binge-eating disorder (BED), which is presented by Anna Guerdjikova, Nicole Mori, Leah Casuto, and Susan McElroy. BED is now recognized as the most common eating disorder, and the FDA recently approved the first medication for its treatment. Another area with exciting developments in the past several years is female sexual dysfunction, which is addressed by Anita Clayton and Elia Margarita Valladares Juarez.

The number of women becoming addicted to alcohol or drugs of abuse has significantly increased, and women have been disproportionately affected by the opioid epidemic. Nassima Ait-Daoud, Derek Blevins, Surbhi Khanna, Sana Sharma, Christopher Holstege, and Pooja Amin provide a comprehensive overview of gender considerations in the assessment and treatment of addiction.

Dementia is an increasing problem in women worldwide due to the higher prevalence in women than in men, the aging population, and the longer lifespan of women compared with men. Todd Derreberry and Suzanne Holroyd review the latest knowledge on sex and gender differences in Alzheimer disease and other dementias as well as the caregiving burden that affects many women.

Despite progress in achieving civil rights, sexual minority and transgender women face significant discrimination (eg, attempts to exclude transgender individuals from serving in the US military), harassment and violence (eg, mass shooting in the LGBTQ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, or queer] nightclub Pulse in Orlando, Florida in 2016), as well as increased rates of mental illness and substance use disorders. Julie Schulman and Laura Erickson-Schroth provide an introduction and recommendations for working with sexual minority and transgender women. Intimate partner violence (IPV) occurs in over one-third of American women. Donna Stewart and Simone Vigod discuss mental health aspects of IPV, including risk factors, sequelae, and management. The article by Nada Stotland discusses reproductive rights as essential to women’s mental health. Although the World Health Organization proclaims access to reproductive health care as a basic human right, ongoing barriers, misinformation, and coercion affecting contraceptive, abortion, and pregnancy care pose a danger to the mental health and well-being of women and their families.

We are grateful to the authors for their outstanding contributions and to the publisher for allowing us this opportunity. We are confident that readers will find that the contents of this issue will greatly enhance their care of women patients.

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