

The Path to Early Intervention: Understanding and Preventing Delays in Treatment of First Episode Psychosis

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Background

- Psychotic disorders have a lifetime prevalence of 3-4% and are associated with significant morbidity and mortality (1).
- A critical factor in improving outcomes for individuals with a psychotic disorder is early identification and intervention during the first episode of psychosis (FEP). This, in turn, shortens duration of untreated psychosis (DUP), thereby improving outcomes (2,3)
- Here, we present a review of the literature to explore the association between DUP and outcome of FEP, and the role of families and the mental health system in shortening the DUP to improve outcomes.

Methods

- An extensive literature search was conducted on the PubMed/Medline databases through June 9, 2025, using keywords including "duration of untreated psychosis," "first episode psychosis," and "early phase psychosis."
- Retrieved articles were reviewed for relevance to the impact of DUP and the effectiveness of early intervention strategies.

Results & Discussion

- 49 publications were identified in our search.
- Articles included in this review demonstrate a clear association between DUP and negative clinical outcomes in patients experiencing FEP.

Results & Discussion

- This review found consistent evidence indicating that longer DUP is associated with increased symptom severity, poorer functional outcomes, and greater rates of relapse (2,3)
- Increases in inflammatory biomarkers and loss of gray matter volume may account for the clinical deterioration and increased morbidity associated with longer DUP (4).
- Research has demonstrated several effective methods for early intervention in FEP, including referral to coordinated, multi-modal specialty care that integrates medication management, psychotherapy, family psychoeducation, and vocational support (5,6)
- The early use of long-acting injectable antipsychotics also reduces the DUP by preventing relapses due to poor adherence (7).
- These timely interventions demonstrated improved prognosis, reduced hospitalization, and better long-term recovery among other positive findings (2,3,7,8)

Conclusions

- These findings underscore the critical importance of early detection and intervention in FEP to minimize DUP.
- Implementing readily accessible and effective early intervention strategies can significantly improve clinical and functional outcomes for individuals experiencing first-episode psychosis, ultimately reducing morbidity.

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