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PATHWAYS TO CARE, DURATION OF UNTREATED PSYCHOSIS AND TREATMENTS RECEIVED BY PATIENTS WITH FIRST-EPISODE PSYCHOSIS

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Introduction: Pathways to care and duration of untreated psychosis (DUP) strongly influence the long-term outcome of schizophrenia.

Aims: To investigate pathways to care, duration of untreated psychosis (DUP) and treatments received by a sample of individuals aged between 18 and 35 years meeting diagnostic criteria for psychosis.

Methods: Pathways to care and DUP were explored by an "ad-hoc" schedule administered to patients and caregivers.

Results: The sample consists of 30 patients. The first episode of psychosis, which occurred at 19.7 (± 4.7) years, was characterized by negative symptoms and disorganized behaviours in more than half of the sample, suicide attempts (28%) and hospital admissions (26%). DUP was 41.6 \pm 60.4 weeks, being longer than that reported in international literature. In 76% of cases patients' relatives asked for a first contact with health professionals, referring the patients to psychiatrists (34% of cases), general practitioners (31%), neurologists (21%) or psychologists (13%). When professionals other than psychiatrists were contacted, the interval between the contact and receipt of appropriate psychiatric treatment (according to the current guidelines) was particularly long (15.2 \pm 32.1 weeks). 34% of patients were treated with a monotherapy of psychotropic drugs: 24% with antipsychotics, 7% with anxiolytics and 3% with antidepressants; 48% received a poly-pharmacotherapy. 35% were treated with psychotherapy (in most of the cases cognitive-behavioural therapy), which was the only treatment for 18% of patients.

Conclusions: These results emphasize the need to train health professionals on diagnosis and treatment of first episode psychosis. DUP may be reduced by anti-stigma campaigns among general population.