Treatment Resistance: Concepts and Management in Mood and Anxiety Disorders

By Mark H. Rapaport, MD

This supplement to CNS Spectrums focuses on exciting emerging data on therapeutic approaches that can help the clinician with difficult-to-treat patients. Over the last decade, there have been tremendous advances in our conceptualization of difficult-to-treat patients, including diagnostic, psychotherapeutic, pharmacotherapeutic, and somatic approaches. A series of articles addressing these advances in the field are presented in this supplement.

Edna B. Foa, PhD, has been a leading expert in cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) for anxiety disorders for many years. Foa and colleagues provide a thoughtful analysis of the particular components of CBT that may be responsible for its efficacy in anxiety disorders. This article goes beyond simple trials looking at the efficacy of CBT or combined treatment with pharmacotherapy and CBT. Foa and colleagues identify individual treatment and patient factors as well as the interaction between the two, that may influence treatment response. Treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder is used as a model for helping us understand this exciting work.

Next, Waguih William IsHak, MD, presents important data about the use of practical and pragmatic treatment paradigms in patients with mood and anxiety disorders. Dr. IsHak emphasizes the importance of standardized structured approaches to facilitate understanding of the breadth of psychopathology present in the patient. The model Dr. IsHak proposes for the evaluation and conceptualization of the patient facilitates the integration of biological factors, psychological factors, and psychosocial variables. His algorithms go beyond merely a technique for assessment and present a rational approach to therapy for patients. These algorithms are limited by existing data, but the steps elaborated within the algorithm are powerful and useful for the clinician. This article serves as a useful guide for both trainees and clinicians with many years in practice.

Finally, Mark H. Rapaport, MD, and colleagues, provide a systematic review of newer pharmacotherapies and somatic treatments for patients with treatment-resistant mood and anxiety disorders. Treatment-resistant mood disorders is the primary emphasis of the article since the majority of theoretical and practical work in the field of psychiatry has focused on this dilemma. Data about current approaches for conceptualizing patients is presented, as well as a brief but systematic review of augmentation strategies for patients with treatment-resistant mood disorders. This article also emphasizes some newer somatic treatments that may impact our treatment paradigms in the future, such as vagus-nerve stimulation and repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation. Lastly, the article provides a brief review of existing data about augmentation strategies for patients with anxiety disorders. Reasons for optimism include emerging research suggesting the ability to link underlying pathophysiological processes with treatment in the near future.

In summary, the goal of this supplement is to present a comprehensive overview of important advances in the field for clinicians who are treating challenging patients with mood and anxiety disorders. The articles presented should facilitate the clinicians' understanding of the emerging conceptual framework being used to help patients who do not respond to initial treatments. An attempt is made to identify psychotherapeutic factors that may be important in the day-to-day interactions between clinicians and their patients; this includes a greater understanding of both patient and treatment variables that impact psychotherapy, and a systematic approach to the assessment and treatment of patients seen by the busy clinician. And finally, the supplement reviews recent advances in augmentation strategies, exciting new findings with alternatives in somatic treatments, and reasons for optimism in terms of more informed treatment choices for our patients in the future. It is my hope that the information provided in this supplement will be useful in facilitating enhancement of your psychiatric practice.