

FC22-05

EFFECTIVENESS OF A HOME AFTERCARE SERVICE FOR PATIENTS WITH SCHIZOPHRENIA AND BIPOLAR DISORDER: A 12-MONTH RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED STUDY

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Introduction: The revolving door phenomenon of hospitalization and relapse is very common among psychiatric patients in Iran.

Objective: To examine the effectiveness of a home aftercare service for patients with schizophrenia and bipolar disorders.

Methods: Patients admitted to Roozbeh hospital (Tehran, Iran) were consecutively enrolled and were randomized into the home aftercare service and the treatment-as-usual groups. In the home aftercare group, multidisciplinary teams made home visits on a monthly basis that provided education and treatment. The treatment-as-usual group received the existing services. All patients were followed one year after discharge in 4-month intervals in which data about rehospitalisations, symptoms, functioning, quality of life, and service satisfaction were obtained.

Results: A total of 130 patients were enrolled (70 with bipolar disorder and 60 with schizophrenia) and were randomized to receive either home aftercare (66) or treatment-as-usual (64). Home aftercare led to greater reduction in mean rehospitalization rate in the follow-up (0.4 in home care vs 0.07 in TAU, $p = 0.011$). Moreover, patients in the home care group had more improvement in psychotic symptoms ($p = 0.003$), depressive symptoms ($p = 0.003$), and clinical global impression of illness severity ($p = 0.008$), as well as greater patient satisfaction with the service ($p < 0.001$). In multiple regression analysis, home aftercare and bipolar diagnosis were associated with less rehospitalization.

Conclusions: Home aftercare is an effective service for patients with severe mental disorders after being discharged from the hospital. Its implementation in aftercare services is suggested.