

# Patients with Serious Mental Illness (SMI) Need Medical and Dental Checkups

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Patients diagnosed and treated for depression, SMI, or placed on psychotropic medications tend to have poorer medical and dental care than the general population, especially those with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. If you are treating any patients with these diagnoses or have patients on psychotropic medications, it is important to ask them if they have a PCP and a dentist, and if they have had a medical and dental checkup recently.

Increased risks for physical health conditions among individuals with SMI, in combination with inadequate health care, result in undiagnosed and untreated medical illnesses. Physical diseases that are more prevalent among the SMI population include<sup>1</sup>:

- Bacterial infections and mycoses (Tuberculosis)
- Viral diseases (HIV, hepatitis B/C)
- Neoplasms (Obesity-related cancer)
- Musculoskeletal diseases (Osteoporosis/ decreased bone mineral density)
- Poor dental status
- Respiratory tract diseases (impaired lung function)
- Sexual dysfunction
- Obstetric complications
- Cardiovascular diseases (e.g., stroke, myocardial infarction, hypertension, other cardiac and vascular diseases)
- Nutritional and metabolic diseases (obesity, diabetes mellitus, metabolic syndrome, hyperlipidemia)

As a result of insufficient diagnosis and treatment of comorbid conditions for members with SMI, they have the highest rate of cardiovascular disease mortality but are the least likely to be screened and treated for dyslipidemia (88% untreated) and hypertension (62% untreated).<sup>1</sup>

Individuals using second-generation antipsychotic drugs (i.e., “atypical” antipsychotic) are at heightened risk for medical illnesses. The evidence has identified an association between the use of specific second-generation antipsychotic drugs and elevated risk for dyslipidemia, weight gain, obesity, prediabetes, and type 2 diabetes.<sup>2</sup> However most of these individuals are not screened or monitored for metabolic risk factors even though national and international guidelines recommend screening and monitoring for diabetes among individuals using antipsychotic medications. Therefore, a person’s weight,

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glucose levels, and lipid levels should be monitored regularly by a medical doctor while taking an atypical antipsychotic medication.<sup>3</sup>

MHN encourages all practitioners to ask about their patients' medical and dental status at least once every 12 months, especially for those with SMI, on psychotropic medications and those at risk for chronic conditions. If your patient does not have a PCP or dentist, please encourage them to call the number on the back of their health plan ID card for assistance.

Coordination of care between the patient's behavioral health provider(s) (BHPs) and their PCP is encouraged and is especially important for this population to ensure medical and behavioral health needs are being met. Communication between providers should include information about a patient's psychiatric medications as new medical information about a patient may require a change in the patient's medication regimen.

Please remember to use the Coordination of Care form available at:

[https://www.mhn.com/static/pdfs/Behavioral\\_Healthcare\\_Coordination\\_form.pdf](https://www.mhn.com/static/pdfs/Behavioral_Healthcare_Coordination_form.pdf)

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<sup>3</sup> De Hert, M., Cohen, D., Bobes, J., Cetkovich-Bakmas, M., Leucht, S., Ndeti, D.M., Newcomer, J.W., Uwakwe, R., Asai, I., Moller, H.J., Gautam, S., Detraux, J., Correll, C.H. (2011). Physical illness in patients with severe mental disorders I. Prevalence, impact of medications and disparities in health care. *World Psychiatry*. 10. 52-77.

<sup>2</sup> American Diabetes Association. Antipsychotic Medications and the Risk of Diabetes and Cardiovascular Disease. *Diabetes Pro: Professional Resources Online*. Retrieved from <http://professional.diabetes.org/resourcesforprofessionals.aspx?cid=77219>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Services. (2010). Mental Health Medications. Retrieved from [http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/mental-health-medications/mentalhealthmedications\\_In.pdf](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/mental-health-medications/mentalhealthmedications_In.pdf).