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Strengthening Mental Health Systems: The Critical Role of Psychologists in a Multidisciplinary Psychiatry Clinic

Strengthening Mental Health Systems: The Critical Role of Psychologists in a Multidisciplinary Psychiatry Clinic

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Schizophrenia is a chronic mental disorder characterised by both positive and negative symptoms. Historically, its management has focused on pharmacological interventions, primarily through antipsychotic medications aimed at reducing acute psychotic episodes and preventing relapse. Long-acting injectable antipsychotics (LAIs) have emerged as a valuable tool, particularly for individuals with adherence challenges, demonstrating efficacy in reducing relapse and hospitalisation rates (Correll et al., 2021; Kane et al., 2022).

However, schizophrenia is not solely a neurochemical disorder; it affects cognition, emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, and overall functioning. Despite the clinical benefits of LAIs, many patients continue to experience poor functional outcomes, suggesting that medication alone may be insufficient. Recent literature supports a biopsychosocial approach that integrates psychological interventions such as cognitive behavioural Therapy (CBT), motivational interviewing (MI), and psychoeducation to improve insight, treatment adherence, and functioning (Mueser & McGurk, 2013; Pilling et al., 2002).

This study aimed to examine the role of psychologists in supporting patients on LAIs within a public multidisciplinary mental health setting. Conducted at Mathari National Teaching and Referral Hospital in an LAI treatment clinic, the process-based study involved data collection through direct observation, semi-structured interviews, and validated psychological assessments with patients and family members. Interventions included individual and group therapy, psychoeducation, and relapse prevention strategies. Patients were followed over a six-month period to assess treatment adherence, relapse rates, insight, and perceived quality of life.

Findings indicated that patients who received psychological support alongside LAIs demonstrated improved adherence, greater illness insight, and fewer relapses. Psychological interventions also helped address trauma histories, interpersonal difficulties, and low self-efficacy. Although the study was limited by a small sample size and short follow-up period, the results support existing evidence on the importance of combining pharmacological and psychosocial interventions (Chien et al., 2022).

These findings highlight the essential role of psychologists in delivering holistic, recovery-oriented care and underscore the importance of strengthening mental health systems through integrated, multidisciplinary approaches in public healthcare.

Keywords: schizophrenia, long-acting injectables, psychological interventions, multidisciplinary care, treatment adherence, public mental health

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