



Ideal Management of Bipolar Disorder is pluralistic and encompasses a 3 pronged approach

1. Psychoeducation
2. Medication (addressed in separate information sheets)
3. Wellbeing plan, including relapse prevention

Addition of non-pharmacological strategies:

- Improves medication compliance,
- Encourages patient to accept their disease and become a proactive part of management team,
- May also improve outcomes (see Lam (2003), *Arch Gen Psychiat*, STEP-BD Program).

## Psychoeducation

Good management starts at diagnosis and involves collaboration with and education of the patient and their 'significant other(s)'

- understanding causes of bipolar disorder, and likely course of the illness,
- information on medication use and managing side-effects,
- recognition of early warning signs of relapse,
- role of mood monitoring,
- tools to improve self-management of life stressors.

A number of useful resources for patients and professionals appear on the Black Dog website, [www.blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au), including:

- A self-testing questionnaire
- Fact sheets for patients and family members
- Mood charts
- Handouts (re. relaxation, exercise and other strategies).



## Relapse Prevention

### Mainstay is medication

*BUT*

It is important to develop a **Wellbeing Plan** to maintain psychological wellness and address recognising and attending to early warning signs of a possible episode.

### Relapse signature:

A relapse signature refers to *FIRST* symptoms that may herald onset of an episode – (hypo)mania or depression

- ◆ Between episodes, identify the first symptoms with your patient
- ◆ Consider potential triggers
- ◆ Draw up an agreed 'plan of action'

*Tip: The Black Dog Institute's Relapse Signature sheet for Depression can be adapted and may be useful for developing this section of the wellbeing plan.*





## Wellbeing Plans

A wellbeing Plan is an agreed course of action drawn up by a patient in consultation with treatment team and significant other(s) to maintain mental and physical equilibrium in the short and long term.

### Special issues in managing bipolar disorder

Patients are often ambivalent about both medication and other changes.

You need to assess and develop a patient's motivation,

- ◆ weigh up 'cost' and 'benefit' of illness
- ◆ benefits of life with fewer episodes

Especially in the areas of

- ◆ sense of self
- ◆ work/life/study plans
- ◆ relationships

Important for patient to OWN the plan – therefore it should not be something professionals impose on their patient but something a patient has developed with others.

### Specific issues to address in Wellbeing Plan

- Coping with stressful situations
- Lifestyle changes
- Regular routine
- Avoiding triggers
- Medication compliance



### Involving others:

Role of significant others

- need to negotiate between episodes
- decide which other(s) may be involved
- agree on nature of involvement if patient becomes unwell

Important issues to address in doctor-patient relationship

- importance of building therapeutic alliance between patient and all treating professionals
- discussion regarding importance of compliance.

*A possible template for a Wellbeing Plan for Bipolar Disorder is available on Black Dog Institute website and included in Psychological Toolkit.*



### Recommended Reading

The following books have been written by Mental Health Professionals who also have Bipolar Disorder themselves and may be useful to as suggested reading for patients.

Orum, M. (1996) **fairytale in Reality: My victory of Manic Depression**. MacMillan.

Russell, S. (2005) **A Life long Journey: Staying Well with manic Depression/Bipolar Disorder**. Michelle Anderson Pub.

Redfield Jamison, K (1996) **An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness**. Vintage.

A new text book for clinicians to be published early 2008.

Parker, G (Editor) (2008), **Bipolar II Disorder: Modelling, Measuring and Managing**. Cambridge University Press.