Day hospital treatment following brief inpatient medical stabilisation for adolescents with anorexia nervosa is equivalent in efficacy to inpatient treatment

Alexis Fertig, Jennifer Wildes

Department of Psychiatry, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA
Correspondence to Alexis Fertig; fertigam@upmc.edu

WHAT IS ALREADY KNOWN ON THIS TOPIC?
Aggressive treatment and weight restoration as early as possible offer the best chance of recovery from anorexia nervosa. Inpatient treatment is often used to ensure adequate weight restoration; however, there are significant drawbacks. In adolescents with anorexia nervosa, family involvement in the treatment is crucial to improved maintenance and recovery, but this can be difficult to attain in an inpatient setting. Furthermore, healthcare spending in most countries is not sustainable at current rates and it is vital to find ways to treat patients effectively while being respectful of limited resources.

WHAT DOES THIS PAPER ADD?
First study to provide a direct comparison of day treatment and inpatient programmes for adolescents with anorexia nervosa.
Findings linked to clinical outcomes and financial burden on the healthcare system support the utility of day treatment programmes after medical stabilisation for anorexia nervosa in adolescents.

LIMITATIONS
More than one-third of patients approached refused to participate. However, this is not unexpected in such a patient population, and no clear demographic differences were apparent between participating and non-participating groups. This study enrolled anorexia nervosa patients with no previous hospital admissions, which limits the generalisability of the results to more chronic patients.

WHAT'S NEXT IN RESEARCH?
It will be important to determine whether a more intensive investment in treatment early in the course of the illness mitigates the significant financial burden of anorexia nervosa. Another area of continued interest involves comparison of responders and non-responders to treatment, regardless of the level of care. Patients with more chronic anorexia nervosa have worse outcomes regardless of the treatment setting, and further research is needed to understand why this occurs.

COULD THESE RESULTS CHANGE YOUR PRACTICES AND WHY?
We are motivated to transition medically stable adolescents with anorexia nervosa to treatment in a day programme as early as possible. This study provides evidence in support of minimising the use of prolonged inpatient hospitalisation. This could expand the number of academic medical centre programmes with the resources to treat adolescents with anorexia nervosa. Nevertheless, treatment by providers with expertise in eating disorders is necessary regardless of the setting.

Competing interests None.
doi:10.1136/eb-2014-101890

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