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Comorbidity of mental disorders and substance use: A brief guide for the primary care clinician

*National
Drug Strategy*

Comorbidity of mental disorders and substance use: A brief guide for the primary care clinician

Drug and Alcohol Services South Australia 2008



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**Comorbidity of mental disorders and substance use:
A brief guide for the primary care clinician**

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The revision of the original Guidelines was undertaken by Drug and Alcohol Services South Australia (DASSA) with Dr Andrea Gordon as the Author and coordinating Research Officer and Dr Chris Holmwood as the Project Manager.

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Abbreviations

AGPN	Australian General Practice Network
AOD	Alcohol and other drugs
ARBI	Alcohol related brain injury
CBT	Cognitive behavioural therapy
CYP 450	Cytochrome P450
DASSA	Drug and Alcohol Services South Australia
DSM-IV	Diagnostic and statistical manual
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
GAD	Generalised anxiety disorder
LSD	Lysergic acid diethylamide
MAO-I	Monoamine oxidase inhibitor
MDMA	3,4 - methylenedioxyamphetamine
NRT	Nicotine Replacement Therapy
OCD	Obsessive compulsive disorder
PARC	Primary Mental Health Care Australian Resource Centre
PBS	Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme
PTSD	Post traumatic stress disorder
RCT	Randomised controlled trial
SNRI	Selective noradrenaline re-uptake inhibitors
SSRI	Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor
TBI	Traumatic brain injury
THC	Tetrahydrocannabinol

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Preface

The original comorbidity management guidelines were published in 2002 when it became apparent that there was a need for clinically relevant information concerning specific comorbidity patterns to be collated into one accessible resource. Most importantly, this resource provided clinicians with information on how best to manage individuals with comorbid mental disorders and substance use issues.

At the time, the information contained in the resource was based on clinician knowledge in the area and what management approaches were effective based on prior experience.

The updated guidelines provide a greater breadth of information on the same previously discussed topics and have a greater academic foundation.

The current guidelines also include information not previously included relating to brain injury, gambling, tobacco, inhalants and solvents.

Introduction

Comorbidity or the co-occurrence of mental disorders and substance use disorders is common. The prevalence of comorbidity in the community and the complex interactions that occur between the two sets of disorders should raise doubts about the manner in which we continue to deal with each entity separately. Clinicians need to consider these problems as part of a whole complex of phenomena that are closely linked to one another.

There are significant problems with the management of people with comorbidity. There is a dearth of evidence about best practice. Specialist mental health or alcohol and other drugs (AOD) services, where they are available, are usually separated physically, administratively and philosophically. Only recently has training for general practitioners (GPs) become adequate for the problems that are faced on a day to day basis, either in the mental health field or the AOD field.

The original resource was developed as a result of work previously undertaken by PARC in 2001 with the development of a set of principles for the management of people with comorbidity.

The updating of these guidelines was undertaken in 2007–08 by Drug and Alcohol Services South Australia, through funding from the Australian Government under the National Comorbidity Initiative, to include the most current management principles obtained from the literature and clinical practice.

There is still a dearth of information available in the literature for some areas of comorbidity discussed in these guidelines. Therefore, management principles in these areas are based on what is currently thought to be reasonable clinical practice rather than on high levels of evidence. In addition, many people with comorbidity have more than one mental disorder and may have problematic use of several substances. This resource is a simple guide that provides a starting point for clinicians.

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