Late schizophrenia in a patient with previous opiate dependence? A clinical report

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Abstract

Introduction: Schizophrenia is a severe psychiatric disorder that can cause long-standing impairments in several life domains. Substance abuse disorder (SUD) is very common in psychiatric patients and is associated with worse outcome. In fact, patients with schizophrenia and SUD, when compared to patients with a single diagnosis, have more severe (positive) symptoms, less treatment compliance, more re-hospitalizations, a higher degree of homelessness, and more legal, medical and social problems.

Objectives: The authors’ goal is to understand the complex role of substance abuse disorder in the patients with schizophrenia, more specifically opiate dependence. Additionally we present an illustrative clinical case.

Methods: A literature research was performed on PubMed database using the keywords schizophrenia, substance abuse, opiate dependence and retrieved papers were selected according to their relevance. The patient clinical record was reviewed.

Results: The authors report a case of a 51 year old woman with psychotic symptoms of persecutory and religious content for 4 years. She had tactile, somatic, auditory and command hallucinations. She has a history of cocaine and heroin abuse and she never felt symptoms while she was abusing of heroin or when she was in a methadone program.

Discussion and Conclusions: Despite the clinical presentation may lead us to the diagnosis of late schizophrenia, the opiate dependence may mask the symptoms. Because of that, in this clinical case the duration of the illness may have been longer than expected. It is important to access the history of substance abuse because it may lead to a different course of the disease, outcome and therapeutic approaches.