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Suicide (Prevention) Notes

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Conclusion: The risk of suicidal behavior and completed suicide is very high in patients with bipolar disorder. This is probably especially so for individuals with Bipolar (I) Disorder. The implications for assessment and management are significant, especially regarding the choice of pharmacotherapy.

Title of Paper:

“Clinical assessment and crisis intervention for the suicidal bipolar disorder patient.” Saunders KEA, Hawton K. *Bipolar Disord* 2013; 15: 575–583.

The Study:

The authors reviewed the literature on suicidal behavior in individuals with bipolar disorder.

Results:

Findings included:

1. Mortality rates in BP are 15-20 times greater than the general population.
2. Of all deaths in patients with BP, 15-19% are due to suicide.
3. 25-50% of BP patients attempt suicide.
4. Risk of suicide in BP patients may be especially high in those with mixed states or rapid cycling.
5. Most authorities believe that lithium is under-utilized in the US as a treatment for BP disorder.

Discussion:

The index of suspicion for suicidal ideation and intent should be high with all bipolar patients. The possible protective effect of Lithium should be considered as should the appropriate role of anti-depressants.

Questions for further consideration:

1. Should antipsychotics be used as monotherapy in BP?
2. Should antidepressants be used in BP patients with manic symptoms?

NOTE: Each issue of “Suicide (Prevention) Notes” is prepared by a member of the IOL’s Executive Committee. This issue was prepared by John Goethe, M.D., Director, Burlingame Center for Psychiatric Research and Education.