Improving outpatient treatment in schizophrenia: effects of computerized guideline implementation--results of a multicenter-study within the German research network on schizophrenia.

Abstract:

Schizophrenia clinical practice guidelines are developed to provide expert- and evidence-based advice to practicing psychiatrists in order to improve the management of this disorder. However, the application of these guidelines in everyday health care can still be described as nonsatisfying. Within the project "Guideline-supported quality management in outpatient treatment", we investigated whether guideline adherence and quality of outcome can be improved by implementing a computer-based, guideline-oriented decision-support system. Therefore, a disease-specific decision-support system was developed interactively presenting guidelines to support the physicians decision-making process during the treatment of schizophrenia patients. We evaluated the system in a control group design: An experimental group consisting of 15 psychiatrists in private practice used the decision-support system, thus documenting the treatment of schizophrenic patients. Guideline-based algorithms were interactively and case specifically displayed on the PC-screen as soon as predefined triggers were met. A first control group in Munich provided treatment-as-usual, documenting the treatment via paper-pencil. Two further physician groups served as additional comparison groups: one
also documented electronically using the decision-support system, however without receiving electronic guideline support, the second group carried out traditional quality circles while also using the paper-pencil approach. As a result of the intervention, we observed a strong initial but time-limited improvement with respect to the core aspects of outpatient treatment in schizophrenia in the experimental group. The findings suggest that decision-support systems, despite their limitations, can be used to enhance treatment outcome in schizophrenia outpatient care.

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