Depression and Illness

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Objectives

• Appreciate how depression and illness may interact
• Discuss how treatment of illness may impact mood, and vice versa
Depression and illness are highly interactive: They have separate but additive effects to adversely impact well-being.
Depression is more common in women with chronic medical illness

• Overall, depression affects 25-33% of people with a chronic illness
  – Heart attack: 40-65%
  – Parkinson’s disease: 40%
  – Multiple sclerosis: 40%
  – Cancer: 25%
  – Diabetes: 25%

Risk may be higher in those with a previous history of depression
Why does illness lead to depression?

• Creates stress
• Interferes with daily activities:
  – Impairs independence
  – Limits mobility
  – Interferes with social interaction
• Affects self-image/ self-confidence
• May cause despair/ lack of hope
Chronic illness may involve pain

• Pain is a separate but related factor leading to depression
• 30-54% of patients with chronic pain experience depression
• Those whose pain limits mobility and independence are most likely to be depressed
Symptoms of illness can overlap those of depression

- Fatigue
- Sleep changes
- Appetite changes
- Loss of energy

These factors may impact the assessment and diagnosis of the underlying disease
Depression can affect the course of illness

• Depression increases the risk of various disorders:
  – Heart disease
  – Stroke
  – Irritable bowel syndrome
  – Parkinson’s disease
  – Dementia

Could be associated with less attention to healthy behaviors or compliance with healthcare
How can depression influence the course of illness?

• Associated with decrease in certain markers of immune function
• Leads to delay in seeking medical care
• In setting of pain, may involve suppression of neurotransmitters (5-HT and NE) that also modulate sensation of pain
What does this have to do with obstetrics & gynecology?

- Women suffer from depression at twice the rate of men
- Depression may impact the course of:
  - Gynecologic cancers
  - Infertility treatments
  - Chronic pelvic pain
  - Fetal development and neonatal behavior
Treating illness

• May improve psychological well being:
  – Reduce pain
  – Improve outlook/ hope
  – Improve function and social interaction
  – Reinforces healthy behaviors
Treating depression

• Does not necessarily directly affect course of illness, but has beneficial effects on quality of life:
  – Decreased perceived disability and fatigue
  – Improves social and emotional functioning
  – Relieves psychological suffering

• In chronic pain patients, antidepressant treatment may reduce intensity and severity of pain
Conclusions

• Be sure to ask patients about their psychological well-being as part of any medical assessment
• Include management of depression symptoms in the treatment of medical disease
• Appreciate that mental health is an important measure of quality of life as your patient deals with medical illness
References

