

Presentation Title

Medical Complications of Eating Disorders

Presenters and Credentials

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Program Description

Perhaps no illness is more indicative of the treatment needs of patients with highly complex co-morbid mental health and medical illness than eating disorders. Anorexia nervosa has the highest mortality rate of any mental health diagnosis with some dying of suicide but many more succumbing to medical problems. Complications generally result from organ failure from malnutrition but also from alcohol and drug use compounding the physiological deterioration with eating disorders as well as those related to alcohol or recreational drug use mixed with medications targeting anxiety and depression. Particularly challenging are the situations where physical symptoms may mask the underlying emotional illness such as that seen with somatization and anxiety-related illness. Physical symptoms may be true manifestations of physical illness, psychosomatic symptoms or other co-morbid mental health illnesses. This can make diagnosis and treatment of eating disorders or other co-morbid mental health issues very challenging with distraught, often resistant patients. These challenges with eating disorder treatment have broader implications for a number of other acute and chronic illnesses in adolescents and young adults, and accurate diagnosis and treatment necessitate the interaction of a multidisciplinary team including mental health, medical and nutrition.

Learning Objectives

Participants will be able to:

1. Demonstrate the acute and evolving needs of patients with eating disorders from a physiologic and emotional perspective
2. Discuss the interplay and potential masking of some aspects of treatment given the complexities of physical and emotional interaction
3. Explain the risks including potentially life-threatening aspects of care when physical and emotional symptoms present simultaneously
4. Assess appropriate evaluation and treatment in a multidisciplinary team setting with emphasis on effective evaluation and treatment of both physical and medical components of the illness utilizing the synergism of effective interaction of team members on both medical and mental health sides of the treatment team

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