

Physical health assessment in patients with psychotic disorders

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Background

According to clinical guidelines, physical health assessments including health history, electrocardiogram (ECG), body weight, blood pressure, and blood lipid measurements should be performed prior to start of antipsychotic medications to reveal cardiac and cardiovascular risk factors (1).

Aim

To investigate to what extent physical health assessments recommended by guidelines for treatment of psychosis were documented in patient records in mental health specialist services.

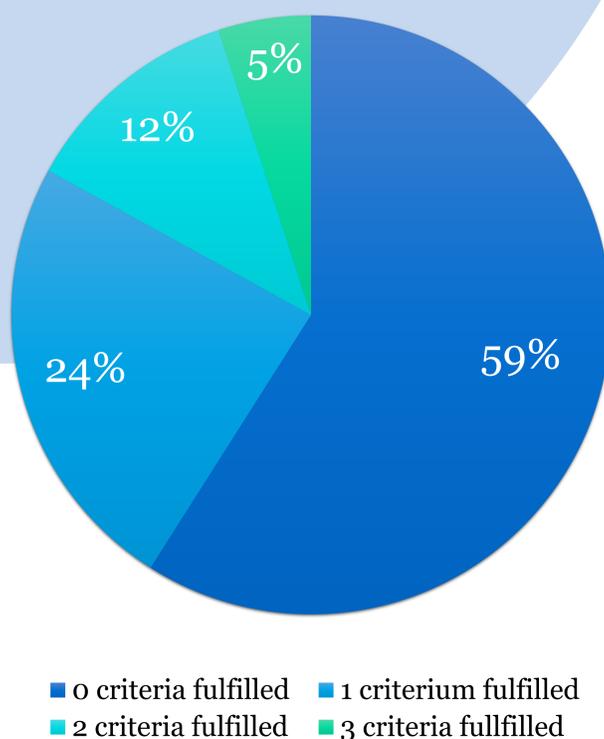
Methods

In a cross-sectional study in 16 units in community mental health centres and hospitals treating patients with psychosis, adherence to guideline recommendations was assessed using four criteria from The Antipsychotic Medication Management Fidelity Scale (2). Two fidelity raters reviewed 10 randomly selected patient records in each unit (N=147 valid patient records) using a checklist.

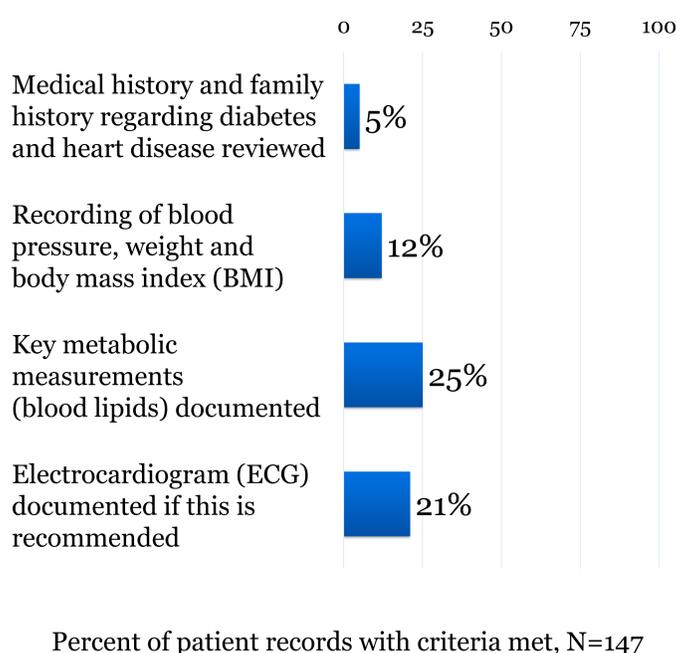
References

1. The Norwegian Directorate of Health. Nasjonal faglig retningslinje for legemiddelbehandling ved psykose [National Clinical Guideline for the Pharmacological Treatment of Psychotic Disorders]. Oslo: The Norwegian Directorate of Health; 2025 [updated 2025 Jan 13].
2. Ruud T, Drivenes K, Drake RE, Haaland VØ, Landers M, Stensrud B, et al. The antipsychotic medication management fidelity scale: psychometric properties. *Adm Policy Ment Health.* 2020;47:911-919.

Percent criteria met in patient journals, N=147



Which criteria met?



Results

None of the patient records had all four criteria fulfilled. Information about patients' medical history and family history regarding diabetes and heart disease was documented in 7 (5%) of the 147 patient records. Recordings of blood pressure, weight and body mass index were documented in 18 (12%) and blood lipids in 36 (25%) patient records. Electrocardiogram (ECG), if recommended for the chosen medication or medical history indicated possible heart disease, was documented in 31 (21%) patient records.

Conclusion and Relevance

Physical health assessments before the start of antipsychotic medications were frequently not documented in patient records, implying low degree of adherence to national and international guideline recommendations.

Systematic quality improvement efforts to increase the frequency of recommended systematic somatic assessments may reduce the risk of undesired medication side effects such as cardiac arrhythmias and metabolic syndrome in patients with psychosis.

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