

## St Vincent's Mental Health Service (Melbourne)

### Professional Development Module in Psychopharmacology

#### **OBJECTIVES**

The aim of this module will be to consider the role of the clinician in optimising psychopharmacological treatments to improve the outcomes for patients who have a mental illness. The module will also cover the key principles of pharmacotherapy in psychiatric disorders that are managed in clinical settings. The module will focus on core skills that will optimised drug therapy and minimise risks related to medication.

Participants will also be given an update in drug classes, target symptoms, efficacy and side effects profile. Emphasis will be given to examine in depth the role of the clinicians in administering and monitoring effects of medication. The relevant drug guidelines, policies and procedures related to administration of medication within St Vincent's Mental Health Service and Australian context will also be covered.

#### **PROGRAM STRUCTURE**

##### **Week 1**

##### **Introduction and role of drug treatments**

- General principles of pharmacological management in psychiatry
- Polypharmacy: features, consequences and clinical issues.
- Role of the clinician in administering and documenting medication.
- St Vincent's medication policy & procedure

##### **Week 2**

##### **Revision of neurotransmitters and mode of action of psychotropics**

- Neurotransmitters and receptor functions
- Mechanism of actions
- Therapeutic and adverse effects
- Drug metabolism

##### **Week 3**

##### **Issues in the use of different classes of psychotropic agents**

- Antipsychotics
- Antidepressants
- Mood stabilisers
- Sedatives and anxiolytics

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- Cognitive enhancers

### **Week 4**

#### **Issues in the use of psychotropics in acute psychiatry and emergencies**

- Use and indications
- Safety issues
- Prn medications
- Nursing issues
- Drug interactions

### **Week 5**

#### **Issues in maintenance pharmacological treatments**

- Assessment of safety
- Managing drug adherence
- Managing side effects
- Depot medications

### **Week 6**

#### **Issues in the use of psychotropics in specific cases**

- Elderly
- Medical disease
- Pregnancy
- Substance abuse and other co-morbidities

## **CORE KNOWLEDGE**

The mental health clinician will gain knowledge in the following key areas of pharmacotherapy in psychiatric disorders.

- The rationale for drug treatments and their role in the delivery of comprehensive psychiatric care.
- An understanding of the basic mechanisms of actions of different classes of psychotropic drugs.
- The range of pharmacotherapy options in the treatment of different psychiatric disorders.
- Overview of the drug actions, their indications, side effects of psychotropic agents including antipsychotics, antidepressants, mood stabilisers, anxiolytics, sedatives and cognitive enhancers.
- The principles of prescribing, choices and dosing for psychotropic drugs.
- Psychiatric assessment incorporating a detailed history of drug treatments and effects

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- Assessment of risk of suicide, drug abuse and accidental harm from using prescribed drugs
- Knowledge of polypharmacy and the risk for drug interactions.
- Knowledge of substance use disorders and other co-morbidities that may impact on the drug therapy in clinical setting
- Understand the issues in attitudes to medications and treatment compliance.
- Understand issues of drug dependence, tolerance, withdrawal and discontinuation of treatment.
- The principles of drug interventions in acute psychiatric crisis and emergencies, and prn prescriptions.
- Knowledge of the use of long-acting or depot medications in psychotic disorders
- Understand the principles of medication use in the elderly, pregnancy, medical diseases and other specific areas

### **CORE CLINICAL SKILLS**

The clinician will develop skills in the assessment and management of patients requiring pharmacological treatments in the following areas.

- Management of patients with mental illness on psychotropic drugs and strategies to enhance treatment adherence including psychoeducation.
- The involvement of carers and social supports in the pharmacotherapy management of patients.
- Maintenance drug treatments and management of illness relapse especially in psychotic disorders.
- Management of adverse effects of drug treatments (eg EPS, weight gain) in the clinical setting.
- Basic approach in pharmacological treatments in acute psychiatric emergencies and the nursing implications
- Administrative and medico-legal responsibilities of drug administration
- Developing a balanced approach to drug therapy in psychiatric disorders through maximising the benefits and minimising the negative effects.