

Report of the UEMS Section for Psychiatry

BIOLOGICAL PSYCHIATRY

The UEMS Section for Psychiatry constituted a Working Group in Biological Psychiatry. The members of the group were: Professor G Christodoulou, Dr V Martin, Dr Wisloff and Professor F Hohagen (Chair). The working group on Biological Psychiatry developed a questionnaire which was distributed to the respective representatives in the UEMS Section for Psychiatry. The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect information on:

- ✗ The role of biological psychiatry in mental health care.
- ✗ The importance of biological psychiatry for diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders.
- ✗ The amount of training in biological psychiatry.

This report aims at giving recommendations on biological psychiatry based on the data collected by the questionnaire.

Fourteen representatives of the Section responded (Sweden, Norway, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Austria, Spain, Germany, Finland, Belgium, Greece, Malta, Ireland, Denmark and the Netherlands).

1. Diagnostic Methods in Biological Psychiatry

A general clinical examination and a neurological examination is routinely performed in all European countries but Belgium and Ireland. Laboratory tests are routinely done in all European countries but Belgium and Ireland. Screening for HIV and syphilis is performed routinely in 30.8% of the countries, while these tests are available in every European country (see Fig. 1). About half of the European countries screen routinely for hypothyroidism (see Fig. 2). Figures 2, 3 and 4 display the use of electrophysiological and radiological methods.

2. Treatment

Psychopharmacology: neuroleptics, antidepressants, anxiolytics and sedatives/hypnotics are the psychopharmacological drugs most frequently used (see Fig. 5). The guidelines for the use of psychopharmacological drugs are provided mainly by institutions and professional associations (see Fig. 6 and 7). Anxiolytics and Sedatives /hypnotics are mainly prescribed by general physicians, while neuroleptics, antidepressants and mood stabilising drugs are mainly prescribed by psychiatrists (see Fig. 8). Drugs are mainly provided by pharmacists. Only in Belgium and in rural areas of Austria drugs are also provided by general physicians. Only in Belgium none-doctors are allowed to prescribe psychoactive drugs. Psychopharmacology is the predominant treatment method for psychiatric disorders in Europe (see Fig. 9). The health insurance companies reimburse psychopharmacological treatment in all countries but Malta, Belgium and Norway. Cost effectiveness is considered in most of the European countries.

While biological treatment methods are most commonly used in Europe, there is a controversy on these treatment approaches in the majority of the European countries (see Fig. 10). Nearly 80% of the representatives reported that there was a controversial discussion about ECT. Ethical guidelines on the use of psychoactive drugs have been established in nearly all European countries (Fig. 10).

3. Training in Biological Psychiatry

In most of the European countries more than 60 hours of training are provided in biological psychiatry, but less than 20 hours in research methodology. More than 60 hours are dedicated to the training of neurobiological basis of psychiatric disorders in the majority of the countries in Europe. Most of the representatives reported that training in psychopharmacology is provided in 20 to 40 hourly seminars.

4. Conclusions

Biological treatment approaches like psychopharmacology are the predominant treatment methods in psychiatry in Europe. This should be taken into consideration when training curricula are established.

On the other hand the public opinion is sceptical about whether biological treatment approaches are helpful in the treatment of mental disorders. In nearly all European countries there is a controversial discussion on psychoactive drugs in psychiatry. Taking into consideration that the effectiveness and efficacy of psychopharmacological treatment is well established in most of the mental disorders this controversial discussion and the poor reputation of psychopharmacological treatment in the public opinion may endanger the compliance of the patient. This may lead to relapses in the treatment of mental disorders like schizophrenia, depression, etc.

The Working Group on Biological Psychiatry makes the following recommendations:

- ✘ Further discussion on training requirements should take into consideration the fact that diagnostic and therapeutic methods of biological psychiatry play an important part in psychiatry and that training in biological psychiatry should be adequately provided (e.g. psychopharmacology).
- ✘ The UEMS Section for Psychiatry should discuss strategies on how to promote a discussion about biological treatment approaches, e.g. psychoactive drugs, and how to provide adequate information about these treatment methods to the public.