Reducing relapse and suicide in bipolar disorder: practical clinical approaches to identifying risk, reducing harm and engaging service users in planning and delivery of care – the PARADES (Psychoeducation, Anxiety, Relapse, Advance Directive Evaluation and Suicidality) programme

Steven Jones,1* Lisa Riste,2 Christine Barrowclough,2 Peter Bartlett,3 Caroline Clements,4 Linda Davies,5 Fiona Holland,5 Nav Kapur,4,6 Fiona Lobban,1 Rita Long,1 Richard Morriss,7,8 Sarah Peters,2 Chris Roberts,5 Elizabeth Camacho,5 Lynsey Gregg2 and Dionysios Ntais5

1Spectrum Centre for Mental Health Research, Faculty of Health and Medicine, Lancaster University, Lancaster, UK
2School of Psychological Sciences, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
3School of Law and Institute of Mental Health, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK
4Institute of Brain, Behaviour and Mental Health, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
5Institute of Population Health, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
6Manchester Mental Health & Social Care NHS Trust, Manchester, UK
7Institute of Mental Health, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK
8Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, Nottingham, UK

*Corresponding author s.jones7@lancaster.ac.uk

Declared competing interests of authors: Richard Morriss received personal fees for chairing the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence Guideline Development Group for bipolar disorder from 2012 to 2014.

Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

Published September 2018
DOI: 10.3310/pgfar06060
Plain English summary

The PARADES programme
Programme Grants for Applied Research 2018; Vol. 6: No. 6
DOI: 10.3310/pgfar06060

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Plain English summary

Bipolar disorder (BD) affects around 1 million people in the UK. People with BD experience periods of elevated and depressed mood across a spectrum. During high mood, people feel more productive and creative, but they can engage in behaviour that has a negative impact on their lives. During low mood, people may struggle to do basic things and may develop suicidal thoughts. To stabilise mood and improve recovery, guidelines recommend that people receive psychological therapy, although few know about or receive this. Having accurate and relevant information can enable people to manage their condition. People who were given an information manual, shared experiences and could personalise it in groups stayed well for longer (in terms of mania but not depression) than those meeting for the same length of time without the manual. For many people, anxiety and alcohol use were seen as an integral part of their BD experiences. In response, we developed two new therapies that addressed these issues as part of BD as opposed to focusing on them as separate issues. Both therapies were highly valued by service users but did not improve outcomes significantly.

A national study confirms that there is a high risk of suicide in people with BD, and that this is often linked to repeated self-harm. Relatives interviewed suggested that faster access to, and continuity of, care are vital in prevention. Finally, we identified changes needed to improve the use of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 (Department of Constitutional Affairs. Mental Capacity Act 2005. London: Department of Constitutional Affairs, HMSO; 2005) for people with BD. This act was designed to help people plan what they want to happen when they are too unwell to make decisions themselves. We successfully developed a ‘Guide to Advance Planning’, which has been downloaded over 20,000 times.
Programme Grants for Applied Research

ISSN 2050-4322 (Print)
ISSN 2050-4330 (Online)

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Editorial contact: journals.library@nihr.ac.uk

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This report
The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by PGfAR as project number RP-PG-0407-10389. The contractual start date was in October 2008. The final report began editorial review in January 2016 and was accepted for publication in November 2016. As the funder, the PGfAR programme agreed the research questions and study designs in advance with the investigators. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The PGfAR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors’ report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, CCF, NETSCC, PGfAR or the Department of Health and Social Care. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the PGfAR programme or the Department of Health and Social Care.

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