

Clinical Assessment, Management and Outcomes of a Group of Adolescents Presenting with Complex Medico-psychosocial Conditions

J E Szyndler,**BSc (Hons), Dip Clin Psychol*, S Towns,***MBBS, FRACP*, R C Hoffman,****BSoc Sc, (Hons), MSoc Sc*,
D L Bennett,*****MBBS, FRACP*

Abstract

Background: Adolescents with complex medico-psychosocial presentations are often seen as a management challenge. The Medical Family Therapy model provides a useful framework for working with these patients in the context of a multidisciplinary approach to treatment. **Materials and Methods:** A retrospective case analysis of 38 patients referred over a two-year period to the Department of Adolescent Medicine was carried out. These patients met DSMIV criteria for somatoform disorder or had a diagnosis of chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS). Duration of symptomatology, diagnosis, the presence of psychiatric conditions in the young person and their immediate family and the type and duration of the intervention were examined in relation to outcome. Two case presentations illustrate the complexity of the assessment and treatment process. **Results:** Clinicians rated 47% of patients who engaged with the service as improved. There was no relationship between diagnosis, length of intervention and outcome. No significant differences emerged between the group of young people diagnosed with CFS and those with somatoform disorders in terms of outcome. Nine patients presented with symptoms which were similar or identical to those of one of their parents. Physical illness was more likely to be reported as a precipitating factor in the CFS group. Poor school attendance and psychiatric morbidity were linked to poor outcome. **Conclusions:** A comprehensive evaluation of presenting symptomatology and focussed intervention with measurable outcomes are important aspects of the clinical approach to complex medico-psychosocial conditions in adolescents. Families' beliefs about the presenting symptomatology and experiences of illness should be explored.

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* Research Psychologist

** Senior Staff Specialist

*** Senior Social Worker

Department of Adolescent Medicine

The Children's Hospital at Westmead

**** Head, Department of Adolescent Medicine

The Children's Hospital at Westmead

Clinical Associate Professor, Department of Paediatrics and Child Health

The University of Sydney

Address for Reprints: Dr Susan Towns, Department of Adolescent Medicine, The Children's Hospital at Westmead, Locked Bag 4001, Westmead NSW 2145, Australia.