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Stephen Poos  
*Rowan University*

Kaitlin McGowan  
*Rowan University*

Ashaki Martin  
*Hackensack Meridian Ocean University Medical Center*

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A Case of Diabulimia in a 23-Year-Old Woman with Extensive Comorbidities

Stephen Poos, OMS-III; Kaitlin McGowan, OMS-III; Ashaki Martin, MD

Rowan University School of Osteopathic Medicine • Stratford, NJ 08084
Hackensack Meridian Ocean University Medical Center • Brick, NJ 08724

Abstract

- Diabulimia is defined as intentionally withholding insulin injections for the purpose of weight loss in the setting of type 1 diabetes mellitus (T1D).
- It is characterized as an eating disorder (ED), although does not yet have DSM diagnosis status.
- Recognition of the condition among medical professionals is limited but growing.

Case Study

- 23-year-old Caucasian female evaluated in the critical care unit for diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA) without coma in December 2021.
  - Prior to admission, the patient had been restricting her food and insulin intake, sometimes withholding food and insulin for up to several days at a time.
  - Denies binging or purging.
  - Sixth hospitalization for DKA in as many months.
  - Admitted to skipping insulin with the intention of losing weight.

Past medical history

- Type 1 diabetes mellitus
- Major depressive disorder
- Generalized anxiety disorder
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Complex regional pain syndrome type 1
- Suicide attempt

Social history

- Sexual assault
- Unstable access to mental healthcare, psychotropic medication, and food
- Lives alone with father, mother is deceased
- Unemployed, poor economic support
- Lack of reliable transportation to medical appointments
- Baseline level of function was lying in bed most of the time

Treatment

- Hospital course
  - Stabilized with IV insulin drip, thiamine, magnesium, phosphorus, and fluids
  - Started on sertraline, nortriptyline, and prazosin.
- Outcome
  - Admitted to partial in-patient eating disorder program, discharged January 2022
  - Readmitted twice in February 2022 for DKA
  - Discharged to home with home care, intensive outpatient program, ED support group

Discussion

- This case is notable for the extensive comorbidities present and the shortcomings in adequately addressing them.
- Diabulimia patients report negative experiences with the healthcare system (5).
- There is a need for provider education on diabulimia and a multidisciplinary response.

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References