INTRODUCTION

In the treatment of various mental illnesses, patients are prescribed psychiatric medications that can contribute to weight gain and metabolic syndrome. For example, antipsychotics have an adverse effect of metabolic syndrome. Additionally, mood stabilizers and antidepressants can also contribute to weight gain. These adverse effects can increase the patient’s risk of developing diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and other life-threatening illnesses. To combat these effects, our multidisciplinary team addressed how nutrition was approached in the Behavioral Health Unit at Vidant Medical Center in Greenville, NC.

MATERIALS & METHODS

• 15 participants receiving inpatient psychiatric treatment in the Behavioral Health Unit.
  • Weekly, 40-minute classes for 6 weeks.
  • Participants learned the major food groups, how to prepare healthy snacks, and were also given a handout of local healthy food resources in our community.
  • Participants completed a questionnaire before and after the classes to assess their growth in nutrition knowledge.

RESULTS

By educating patients in the Behavioral Health Unit about making healthier choices during hospitalization and providing them with resources to continue making nutritious choices once discharged, we aimed to decrease the negative physical effects of their medication regimen.

RESOURCES GIVEN TO PATIENTS

• 15 participants receiving inpatient psychiatric treatment in the Behavioral Health Unit.
  • Weekly, 40-minute classes for 6 weeks.
  • Participants learned the major food groups, how to prepare healthy snacks, and were also given a handout of local healthy food resources in our community.
  • Participants completed a questionnaire before and after the classes to assess their growth in nutrition knowledge.

CONCLUSION

It is imperative that all clinicians be mindful of both the benefits and potential risks of psychiatric medication. The utilization of nutritional advice, medication management, therapy, and physical activity, can improve the overall health of patients with mental illness. Our study showed that giving the education, proper tools, and a multidisciplinary approach, patients can benefit from information on how to make healthier decisions to prevent the adverse metabolic effects of their medication regimen.

FUTURE GOALS

• Continue to provide nutrition classes on the Behavioral Health Unit.
• Following up with patients during clinic visits and providing further education on nutrition.
• Phone follow up to gauge long-term impact on the Nutrition Matters course and interest in similar events in the future.
• Community outreach and events: hosting nutritional advice days on the hospital campus and the local library.
• Nutrition matters walks in order to raise funds for community outreach programs and for the local food pantry and soup kitchen.

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