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Patients with schizophrenia and their finances: how they spend their money

Laurence Borrás ¹, Sylvia Mohr, Maria Boucherie, Sophie Dupont-Willemin, François Ferrero, Philippe Huguelet

Affiliations + expand

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Abstract

Introduction: Although most patients with schizophrenia rely on state financial support, little is known about their expenses and how they use the money at their discretion. However, the ability to budget is a predictive factor in rehabilitation. An assessment of financial management skills could make it possible to develop more appropriate psycho-social assistance.

Method: Fifty-seven outpatients with schizophrenia treated in the public sector in Geneva, Switzerland took part in the study. Psychosocial, diagnostic, neurocognitive and symptomatological measures were collected. Data were gathered on patients' incomes and quality of life. A prospective analysis of their expenses during a 1-month period was also performed.

Results: Median income was 4,125 Swiss francs per month (i.e., 3,372 US dollars). After paying fixed expenses (which were handled with or without the assistance of a representative payee), a mean of 400 Swiss francs remained at their disposal to use as they wished. Seventy-two percent of this money was devoted to the use of psychoactive substances (e.g., cigarettes, alcohol, cannabis) or various drinks in coffee houses, and 28% on leisure activities (trips, sports and other recreational activities). Eighty-four percent of patients would have liked to have more money for leisure activities. The study was well-accepted and led to modification of the treatment plan in 84% of cases.

Conclusion: Most of the discretionary money patients received was used for buying substances with addictive properties; this may hinder the practice of activities favouring recovery. Thus, it appears essential to guide patients in the management of their budgets.

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