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“Nutritional psychiatry”—Teaching the impact of nutrition on physical and mental well-being

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Background: Despite the multifactorial genesis of psychiatric disorders, there is increasing evidence that nutrition not only influences the prevalence, but also the onset and the course of psychiatric disease. Nevertheless, study results show that nutrition is still not taught at medical universities and is not an integral part of undergraduate and graduate medical and psychiatric education.

Aim: This presentation highlights the important role of nutritional psychiatry as an essential pillar of the biopsychosocial treatment model of psychiatric patients. It underlines the importance of teaching nutrition to students of medicine and psychiatry trainees.

Methods: Interactive case vignettes are used to illustrate the role of nutrition in psychiatric and current scientific evidence. The impact of nutrition on the gut microbiome and the gut brain axis influencing our mood and behavior through regulation of neurotransmitters (such as serotonin, GABA and dopamine) is discussed. Further, an easy-to-handle nutritional interview approach for psychiatrists is presented. Secondly, this presentation focuses on dietary interventions for the treatment of depression and translates recent scientific evidence into concrete food prescriptions for patients.

Discussion: An adequate supply of micro- and macronutrients is essential for well-being and may also be a fundamental requirement for the efficacy of psychopharmacological treatment. As knowledge about dietary approaches appears to be as important for psychiatrists as for gastroenterologists and endocrinologists, nutritional psychiatry was implemented as an elective course for students and future psychiatrists at the Medical University of Graz and is an integrative part of our psychoeducational group for inpatients suffering from depression. We hope that this presentation helps to implement nutritional approaches in basic psychiatric care and in the curriculum of medical schools in Europe.

Recent Publications:

1. Marx W, Moseley G, Berk M and Jacka F (2017) Nutritional psychiatry: The present state of the evidence. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society* 76(4):427–436.
2. Daley B J, Cherry-Bukowiec J, Van Way III C W, Collier B, Gramlich L, et al. (2016) Current status of nutrition training in graduate medical education from a survey of residency program directors: a formal nutrition education course is necessary. *Journal of Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition* 40(1):95–99.
3. Dash S, Clarke G, Berk M and Jacka F N (2015) The gut microbiome and diet in psychiatry: Focus on depression. *Current Opinion in Psychiatry* 28(1):1–6.
4. Sarris J, Logan A C, Akbaraly T N, Amminger G P, Balanzá-Martínez V, et al. (2015) Nutritional medicine as mainstream in psychiatry. *The Lancet Psychiatry* 2(3):271–274.
5. Chung M, Van Buul V J, Wilms E, Nellessen N and Brouns F J P H (2014) Nutrition education in European medical schools: Results of an international survey. *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 68(7):844

Biography

Sabrina Mörkl is a Medical Doctor, Trained Psychotherapist (Integrative Behavioral Therapy), Acupuncturist, Deputy Student Teaching Coordinator for Psychiatry and Psychotherapeutic Medicine at the Medical University of Graz (MUG) and a Board Member of the Austrian Society of Medical Hypnosis (ÖGMH). In her doctoral thesis, she explored the gut microbiome of anorexia nervosa patients in comparison to other BMI groups and athletes. As nutrition is a critical influence factor for gut and brain health (which was also reflected by her study results), she began to focus on the important role of nutrition in psychiatric healthcare. In 2018, together with Dr Wagner-Skacel, she founded the first elective university course in Europe on nutrition-based- prevention and treatment approaches in psychiatric care.

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