

Management of Severe Anorexia Nervosa: A Case Report

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Introduction:

Anorexia nervosa (AN) is an illness characterized by an intense fear of weight gain, distorted body image, and severe restriction in caloric intake. If left untreated can result in complications including cardiac arrhythmias, malnutrition, and death. In this report, we describe a case of AN and the medical and psychiatric management of the patient by a multidisciplinary team which included psychiatrists, dieticians, palliative care, and hospitalist physicians.

Case Summary:

We present the case of a 38-year-old female with a past psychiatric history of bipolar 1 disorder, alcohol use disorder in remission, and anorexia nervosa who presented to the hospital with nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain. Her body mass index (BMI) was 10 kg/m² and labs revealed hypokalemia and hyponatremia. She originally refused intravenous fluids due to fear it would lead to weight gain and would not tolerate oral intake of food. Psychiatry was consulted and she was initiated on quetiapine as well as continued on lamotrigine, her home mood stabilizer. While on quetiapine, she had minimal improvement in appetite although continued to have delusions regarding her body. The decision was made to discontinue quetiapine and begin olanzapine. While this medication stimulated the patient's appetite, she experienced anxiety regarding weight gain due to refeeding edema, causing significant swelling in her abdomen and lower extremities. This edema was resolved with spironolactone and furosemide. The patient's condition improved during her twenty-nine-day hospital stay and her BMI on discharge was 16.4 kg/m².

Conclusions:

Management of anorexia nervosa requires regard for both the severity of the patient's medical condition as well as a careful understanding of her psychological stressors. Through patience and collaboration, the treatment team was able to gain the patient's trust, improve her metabolic condition and allow her to feel comfortable with a healthier weight.

Keywords: Anorexia Nervosa, Refeeding Edema, Restrictive Eating

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