Bipolar Disorder More Common

A new survey indicates that as many as 4% of American adults might have bipolar disorder at some point in their lifetime, higher than the 1% prevalence found in previous surveys. Researchers from the National Institute of Mental Health queried about 9,282 people from 2001 to 2003 as part of the National Comorbidity Survey-Replications. Based on the survey, the authors reached estimates of 1% for bipolar I disorder, 1.1% for bipolar II disorder, and 2.4% for subthreshold bipolar disorder. Most patients with a lifetime history of bipolar disorder and lifetime treatment were under the care of psychiatrists; patients with subthreshold bipolar disorder were more likely to receive care from a general medical professional. In looking at the previous 12 months of medication therapy, the authors found that 43% of patients receiving psychiatric care got appropriate medications, compared with only 9% of those getting general medical care. The study appeared in the May issue of the Archives of General Psychiatry.

Drug Abuse Treatment Rare

Results of another government-sponsored survey in the same issue of the Archives finds that 8% of identified drug abusers and less than 40% of people diagnosed with drug dependence ever get treatment. The National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions was conducted by the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. The researchers also found that 10% of Americans have trouble with drug use or abuse during their lifetimes, including 3% who become dependent at some point. Abuse and dependence were highest among men, Native Americans, people aged 18-44 years, unmarried individuals, and those in a lower socioeconomic stratum. Researchers attribute this finding to a recent study that came from face-to-face interviews conducted from 2001 to 2002 with 43,000 adults.

Call to Share Student Mental Info

A new bill in the U.S. House of Representatives would allow schools and universities to share a student’s mental health information with parents, guardians, but only if the student is considered a danger to himself or others. Rep. Tim Murphy (R-Pa.), a child psychologist and cochair of the Congressional Mental Health Caucus, sponsored the legislation (H.R. 2220). The defendants alleged the company misled parents by not disclosing that the drug was dangerous and ineffective for children under age 18 years. Paxil maker GlaxoSmithKline was required to put $63.8 million into a fund to pay class members’ out-of-pocket expenses and attorneys’ fees, but members who could not provide proof of expenses were limited to a $15 payout and a pro rata share of $300,000, depending on the number of claimants. In a revised settlement approved by the Third Judicial Circuit of Madison County, Ill., claimants without documentation will now get up to $100, and the $300,000 pro rata cap is eliminated. Public Citizen said, “The revision significantly improves the value of the settlement, particularly to those class members who were unable to document their claim,” said Jennifer Sobel, an attorney with Public Citizen, in a statement. Information on the settlement is at www.paxildedicatedsettlement.com.

New Medicare Leadership

President Bush recently nominated Kerry N. Weems, a 24-year veteran of the Department of Health and Human Services, to lead the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Mr. Weems now serves as deputy chief of staff to HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt. He understands the large fiscal challenges facing Medicare and Medicaid and what it will take to strengthen and sustain those programs for the future,” Mr. Leavitt said. Mr. Weems was confirmed by the Senate, Mr. Weems will fill the vacancy left by Dr. Mark B. McClellan, who resigned from CMS last year. Leela V. Norwalk is the current acting CMS administrator.

—Alicia Ault