

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dr. Wolff is a board-certified family physician in private practice in Cornelius, North Carolina. He finished his family practice residency in 1997. He has graciously consented to share stories from the trenches of primary care. While his practice diary is taken from actual patient encounters, the reader should be aware that some medication references may represent off-label uses. Identifying details have been changed to protect patient confidentiality.

We at the *Companion* are certain that these vignettes will inform, entertain, challenge, and stimulate our readers in their effort to address behavioral issues in the everyday practice of medicine.

I'm Not a Psychiatrist, But I Have Stayed in Budget Hotels Before

Christian G. Wolff, M.D.

Monday

An amazingly busy day hit another speed bump when I stepped into the room with TE. TE is a middle-aged fellow in tears. I am already familiar with his story—reformed alcoholic with bipolar disorder, who recently refinanced his house to pay \$200,000 of gambling losses after 1 weekend in Las Vegas. I also know that his psychiatrist felt that he needed a change in his medications, and since then, TE quit his job for no apparent reason. He also stopped taking his medications. At the behest of his wife, I have tried to call TE's psychiatrist, but she refuses to return my calls. TE wants me to take over. I told TE that I was not qualified to manage his illness in the long term, but I started him on his most effective combination, which he was taking when he left rehab 2 years ago, and arranged for him to get a second opinion from another psychiatrist.

Tuesday

GR is a college student on winter break who is accompanied by her mom. Mom is quite alarmed after being called to pick up GR when she was found disoriented following exams. She has had 4 smaller "spells" since that incident. I reviewed her emergency department reports and noticed the absence of her selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor. She admits that she abruptly quit taking her sertraline 3 days before exams because she had run out and did not have time to get a refill. So, I explained the possibility that GR may have been experiencing a discontinuation syndrome and arranged for her to see a neurologist in order to rule out a seizure disorder. I will bet that she refills her prescriptions from now on.

Wednesday

VT returns for follow-up and is delighted that her migraines have nearly vanished since taking topiramate. Additionally, her generalized fatigue and pain (which had been characterized as fibromyalgia) have significantly improved. I wonder, chicken or egg?

Friday

This week ends with a doozy. Again, a spouse presents for help with stress. Her husband, a prominent celebrity known for his vivacity, was recently diagnosed with an autoimmune disorder. The good news is that prednisone is fabulously suppressing his illness. The bad news is that since he started this therapy, his hypomania crossed the line into mania in a big way. I called his regular physician, a colleague of mine at another location of our practice, who managed to convince him to try some olanzapine "to take the edge off and get some sleep." ♦