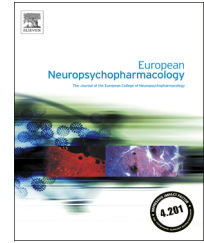




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REVIEW

# Learning from the past and looking to the future: Emerging perspectives for improving the treatment of psychiatric disorders



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## Abstract

Modern neuropsychopharmacology commenced in the 1950s with the serendipitous discovery of first-generation antipsychotics and antidepressants which were therapeutically effective yet had marked adverse effects. Today, a broader palette of safer and better-tolerated agents is available for helping people that suffer from schizophrenia, depression and other psychiatric disorders, while complementary approaches like psychotherapy also have important roles to play in their treatment, both alone and in association with medication. Nonetheless, despite considerable efforts, current management is still only partially effective, and highly-prevalent psychiatric disorders of the brain continue to represent a huge personal and socio-economic burden. The lack of success in discovering more effective pharmacotherapy has contributed, together with many other factors, to a relative disengagement by pharmaceutical firms from neuropsychiatry. Nonetheless, interest remains high,

*Abbreviations:* ADHD, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; AR, adrenergic; ASD, Autism-Spectrum Disorder; BDNF, brain derived neurotrophic factor; CNV, copy number variant; COMT, catechol-o-methyltransferase; DA, Dopamine; DSM, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual; ECNP, European College of Neuropsychopharmacology; EEG, electroencephalography; EMA, European Medicines Agency; EU, European Union; FDA, Food and Drugs Administration; GABA, gamma-aminobutyric acid; GPCR, G-protein coupled receptor; GWAS, genome-wide association study; HTS, high-throughput screening; ICD, International Classification of Disorders; iPSC, induced Pluripotent Stem Cells; MAO, monoamine oxidase; MRI, magnetic functional imaging; NA, noradrenaline; NIH, National Institute of Health; NMDA, N-methyl-D-aspartate; OCD, obsessive-compulsive disorder; PAM, positive allosteric modulator; PK/PD, pharmacokinetic/pharmacodynamic; R&D, Research and Development; SSRI, serotonin reuptake inhibitor; SGA, second-generation antipsychotic; TCA, tricyclic antidepressant; US, United States

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OCD;  
Anxiety;  
ADHD;  
Bipolar;  
Personalised;  
iPSC

and partnerships are proliferating with academic centres which are increasingly integrating drug discovery and translational research into their traditional activities. This is, then, a time of transition and an opportune moment to thoroughly survey the field. Accordingly, the present paper, *first*, chronicles the discovery and development of psychotropic agents, focusing in particular on their mechanisms of action and therapeutic utility, and how problems faced were eventually overcome. *Second*, it discusses the lessons learned from past successes and failures, and how they are being applied to promote future progress. *Third*, it comprehensively surveys emerging strategies that are (1), improving our understanding of the diagnosis and classification of psychiatric disorders; (2), deepening knowledge of their underlying risk factors and pathophysiological substrates; (3), refining cellular and animal models for discovery and validation of novel therapeutic agents; (4), improving the design and outcome of clinical trials; (5), moving towards reliable biomarkers of patient subpopulations and medication efficacy and (6), promoting collaborative approaches to innovation by uniting key partners from the regulators, industry and academia to patients. Notwithstanding the challenges ahead, the many changes and ideas articulated herein provide new hope and something of a framework for progress towards the improved prevention and relief of psychiatric and other CNS disorders, an urgent mission for our Century.

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## Contents

1.	Introduction: the challenge of improving the treatment of brain disorders . . . . .	601
1.1.	The huge personal and socio-economic burden of disorders of the brain . . . . .	601
1.2.	The current status of Research and Development (R&D) in neuropsychopharmacology . . . . .	602
1.3.	Aims and organisation of this article . . . . .	602
2.	The history and evolution of pharmacotherapy for psychiatric disorders . . . . .	605
2.1.	The origins of neuropsychopharmacology . . . . .	605
2.2.	Antipsychotics for the treatment of schizophrenia (Figure 1, Table 1) . . . . .	605
2.2.1.	Chlorpromazine to haloperidol, the neuroleptics . . . . .	605
2.2.2.	The atypical antipsychotic, clozapine: unique clinical efficacy. . . . .	606
2.2.3.	Second generation antipsychotics: the serotonin connection . . . . .	606
2.2.4.	The D2/D3 receptor partial agonist, aripiprazole . . . . .	607
2.2.5.	Lack of antipsychotic efficacy vs negative, neurocognitive and social cognitive symptoms. . . . .	607
2.3.	Antidepressants for the treatment of major depression (Figure 2, Table 1) . . . . .	608
2.3.1.	Tricyclic agents . . . . .	608
2.3.2.	Monoamine reuptake inhibitors: selective and multi-modal . . . . .	608
2.3.3.	Multi-target agents blocking 5-HT <sub>2C</sub> receptors: mirtazepine and agomelatine . . . . .	609
2.3.4.	Other potential mechanisms of action: modulation of glutamatergic transmission. . . . .	610
2.3.5.	Monoamine oxidase inhibitors: irreversible to reversible . . . . .	610
2.4.	Agents for the treatment of bipolar disorder (Figure 3 and Table 1) . . . . .	610
2.5.	Anxiolytic agents for treating anxiety disorder and insomnia (Figure 4 and Table 1). . . . .	612
2.5.1.	Benzodiazepines: the prototypical anxiolytics . . . . .	612
2.5.2.	Non-benzodiazepine agents for treating anxiety disorders and insomnia . . . . .	613
2.6.	Agents for treatment of Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (Figure 5 and Table 1) . . . . .	613
2.7.	How 60 years of neuropsychopharmacology is informing future R&D for improving the treatment of brain disorders . . . . .	614
2.7.1.	Steady progress, yet with a remaining need to enhance treatment efficacy . . . . .	614
2.7.2.	The importance of solid clinical feedback for novel mechanisms: on the issue of its absence. . . . .	615
2.7.3.	Key messages concerning pharmacotherapeutic agents and drug development . . . . .	615
2.8.	Sequencing the human genome and its dubious impact on drug discovery for psychiatric disorders . . . . .	616
3.	Clinical characteristics and causes of psychiatric disorders (Table 2) . . . . .	616
3.1.	Normal and healthy states: defining the boundary to psychiatric disorders . . . . .	616
3.2.	Categorising and discriminating between psychiatric disorders, the advent of DSM-5 . . . . .	618
3.3.	Comorbidity amongst psychiatric disorders: trans-nosological domains of dysfunction . . . . .	618
3.4.	An ongoing process of refinement and convergence . . . . .	619
4.	Pathophysiological substrates of psychiatric disorders: multiple anomalies from molecules to cerebral circuits (Table 2) . . . . .	619
4.1.	Insights from neurological and somatic disorders . . . . .	619
4.2.	Linking the genetics of psychiatric disorders to causal mechanisms and targets . . . . .	620
4.3.	Scrambling the genetic message: epigenetic re-programming. . . . .	621
4.4.	The view from above (and below): the crucial importance of networks . . . . .	621

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