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Biomarkers in Mood Disorders: Are we there Yet?

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Mood disorders are highly prevalent and are associated with significant morbidity and mortality. As with other psychiatric conditions, given that there is no biological diagnostic test, mood disorders are currently diagnosed based on clinical interview and behavioral observation using criteria defined by DSM.5 or ICD.10. Misdiagnosis and delayed diagnosis are common for a variety of reasons, leading to inappropriate and delayed treatment with significant impact on clinical outcomes, functioning and quality of life for patients.. Further, the treatment decisions for each patient are often based on clinician and patient preferences and adverse event profile of medications. This is because there are no reliable objective measures that can assist clinicians in predicting which patients will likely respond to what medication. . Consequently, many patients have to go through several treatment trials before the right medication is found that is effective and tolerable. As well, many psychotropic medications such as mood stabilizers and antidepressants usually take some time before clinically significant beneficial effect on symptoms can be observed, thus increasing the time during which the patient remains symptomatic in this current 'trial and error' approach. Providing ineffective therapies has substantial consequences for individual and societal cost, including persistent distress and poor well-being, risk of suicide, loss of productivity, and wasted health care resources. Thus, there is an urgent need to develop biomarkers that assist in diagnosis, predict response to treatments and disease prognosis in patients with mood disorders.

A "biomarker" is defined by the NIH workgroup as "a characteristic that is objectively measured and evaluated as an indicator of normal biological processes, pathogenic processes or pharmacological responses to a therapeutic intervention (Biomarkers workgroup: Biomarkers as surrogate endpoints: Clinical Pharmacology and therapeutics, 2001, 69, 89-95). Therefore, from a clinical perspective, a biomarker can be used to detect the presence or progression of a disease or the effectiveness of a given treatment (Boksa, 2013). The use of biomarkers in medicine is a common and valuable approach in several clinical fields.

However, no clinically relevant biomarker has been found for the field of neuropsychiatry, at least not of enough sensitivity and specificity to be actually used in the

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