

Health Anxiety

Introduction

This module explores consultations involving health anxiety in primary healthcare. Health anxiety is common, with a prevalence of about 20% in medical settings, and is associated with an increased use of healthcare services.^{1,2} As with all our modules, the cases and information section were designed around the learning needs of a focus group of members, undertaken at the beginning of the module's development.

While 'health anxiety' is the commonly used term, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fifth edition (DSM-5), has included three conditions, namely: Somatic Symptom Disorder (SSD), Illness Anxiety Disorder (IAD) and Functional Neurological Disorder (FND) under the category of 'Somatic Symptom and Related Disorder'. Hence the term hypochondriasis, which was related to health anxiety in the fourth edition, (DSM-4) has been replaced by two new diagnostic entities (SSD and IAD) in the latest edition of DSM-5. This module will not cover functional neurological disorder as the writing team considered that this topic was worthy of a separate module.

Health anxiety is a concern for many primary healthcare clinicians who may have limited time in consultations to understand a patient's concerns and may focus on investigations and the interpretation of results. Patients with health anxiety are at risk of over-investigation, over-diagnosis and may receive incorrect treatment as a result of their underlying problem not being recognised.

Learning outcomes

- Recognise patients who present with symptoms of health anxiety
- Diagnose and treat patients who have health anxiety