

The Impact of IgG4-RD on Patients' Mental Health

Q&A WITH PARASTOO FAZELI, MD



Q. Do any of your patients struggle with their mental health?

Many of my patients struggle with anxiety and depression. I've noticed that my patients with organ damage and more severe complications related to a delay in diagnosis struggle with depression the most. In general, most people living with a rare disease that does not have a cure and is not widely known, struggle with anxiety and depression at some point in their lives. Some IgG4-RD patients are prescribed steroids to help manage their condition, and steroid use has the potential to impact one's mood.

Q. Is there a correlation between the lack of awareness of IgG4-RD and the mental health of patients?

The lack of awareness around IgG4-RD does impact patients' mental health. In the rare disease community, there's what is called the diagnostic odyssey, and it refers to the prolonged journey to get to an accurate diagnosis. Whenever patients must go from doctor to doctor to try and figure out what's wrong, it takes a toll on them. This overwhelming feeling can be compounded by wrong diagnoses and related complications.

Q. How can access to clinicians, experts and treatments impact IgG4-RD patients' mental health?

Access to treatment and specialists can positively impact patients' mental health. I've noticed that when patients come to me, there's a sense of relief that occurs, knowing they finally have an accurate diagnosis and can begin receiving proper care. Even access to telehealth can impact patients' mental health because they can now be seen by a clinician without the burden of travel. Access to specialists and proper care goes a long way in lightening the mental load that rare disease patients carry.



Q. What have you noticed about patients' mental health when they are not able to access proper care and treatment?

Without proper care and treatment, patients' physical health can decline. As pain and other symptoms worsen, patients cannot execute daily tasks, go to work, have a full social life and more. This significantly impacts their mental state. And, we are now learning that there is a psychological response to a physiological issue. One of the hallmark symptoms of IgG4-RD is inflammation, and studies show that inflammation of the brain can trigger depression or depressive episodes.

Q. How can clinicians support the mental health challenges of their patients?

The best way to support patients' mental health needs is to connect them with resources and other professionals. I work closely with a team of mental health providers, pain management specialists, social workers and more. Patients already have to juggle their physical health, appointments and more. Supporting them as they connect with the appropriate clinician reduces the burden on themselves.

“The best way to support patients' mental health needs is to connect them with resources and other professionals.”



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Parastoo Fazeli, MD is a board-certified rheumatologist based in Minneapolis, MN.



Alliance for Patient Access

The Alliance for Patient Access is a national network of policy-minded health care providers advocating for patient-centered care.

AllianceforPatientAccess.org

