The next stage for early intervention: transdiagnostic, personalized, universal

Patrick McGorry MD PhD

More than a quarter of a century ago the aspirational goal of early intervention in psychotic disorders emerged as a reality for patients and families. Guided by an international wave of research and inspired by new clinical service models with optimistic, stigma-free cultures of care, the idea transformed thinking within a psychiatry which was struggling to modernise and catch up with the rest of health care. Much progress has occurred culminating in studies such as the RAISE project in the USA which have opened the gateway for national reform. Yet progress is piecemeal and comprehensive upscaling has not yet occurred to enable every person with psychotic illness is to receive timely, personalised and sustained clinical care and reach their full potential. The success of the EI paradigm in psychosis however indicates the need for this principle to be extended to the full diagnostic spectrum. EI has universal value in health care and the fluidity of our syndromal approach to diagnosis both cross-sectionally and longitudinally means that we cannot focus too narrowly. The clinical staging model may enable us to translate the principles of early intervention to a wide range of mental disorders.

This obviously means a progressive and substantial increase in spending in mental health care and a major redesign of the way mental health care is delivered within our mainstream health systems. We need new cultures of care appropriate to early intervention and mental health care. We can no longer be expected to merely fit in to standard medical environments as if mental health care is exactly the same as physical health care. Outcomes can already be dramatically improved with existing knowledge for most people not only with psychotic illness but other potentially serious disorders. This will also save a great deal of taxpayers' money.

Through more refined prediction strategies and definition of underlying mechanisms we can also move towards the holy grail of a more personalized approach to treatment. Rather than developing risk syndromes for a number of traditional disorders within our 19th century diagnostic silos we need to consider a pluripotential approach. The move to RDoC in the USA also supports this goal. Transdiagnostic research will be more feasible if we transform and rebuild systems of care to remove stigma and guarantee "soft entry", investing heavily in a new youth oriented culture of care, through which very early access is possible at the sub threshold stage, stepwise expertise is progressively available and functional recovery is the goal. All these things are achievable if we combine the power of the evidence-based paradigm with greater confidence, tenacity and much more intensive and professional advocacy in partnership with every single member of the general public.

Professor Patrick D. McGorry AO, MBBS, MD, PhD, FRCP, FRANZCP, is Executive Director of Orygen Youth Health Research Centre and Professor of Youth Mental Health at the Centre for Youth Mental Health, University of Melbourne. He is also a founding board member of the National Youth Mental Health Foundation. Professor McGorry is a world-leading researcher in the area of early psychosis and youth
mental health and his innovative research has played an integral role in the development of safe, effective treatments for young people with emerging mental disorders, notably the psychotic and severe mood disorders.

Professor McGorry has published over 400 papers and book chapters and has edited five books. He is a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia and has been the recipient of numerous awards, including the NAMI Scientific Research Award in 2013, Australian of the Year in 2010, Victorian Australian of the Year in 2009, the Castilla Del Pino Award in recognition of his significant contribution to the field of psychiatry in Spanish-speaking countries in 2009, the Australian Government Centenary Medal in 2003, and the Founders’ Medal of the Australian Society for Psychiatric Research in 2001.