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IMPLEMENTING FAMILY PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION IN BIPOLAR I DISORDER: A RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIAL

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Introduction: Bipolar disorder is associated with high personal and social burden, impaired social functioning and high levels of disability. The psychoeducational family intervention, found to be effective in the treatment of schizophrenia, may be particularly useful for patients with bipolar disorder and their relatives.

Aims & methods: This study, funded by the Italian Ministry of Health, coordinated by the Department of Psychiatry of the University of Naples SUN and carried out in 11 randomly selected mental health centres, included the following phases:

- 1) development of informative materials;
- 2) training of 2 mental health workers per center;
- 3) random selection of 16 families of patients with bipolar disorder for each center: 8 being randomly allocated to the experimental group and 8 to the control group.

Results: 62 families have been recruited. Mental health workers reported several advantages in conducting the intervention, in particular in the relationship with patients and families. Significant improvements have been reported in professional skills and relationships with colleagues. The advantages tend to increase over time. The main reported difficulties are lack of time to run the intervention, identification of appropriate families, excessive workload and the need to integrate this intervention with other work commitments.

Conclusions: It is possible to provide psychoeducational family intervention for patients with bipolar I disorder and their families, after a relatively short period of training. In order to facilitate the dissemination of this intervention in routine conditions, a better planning of the activities of the mental health centers may be useful.