

Unit 4: Amphetamines and psychosis

Case study part A - Ben

Ben is a 29 year old who works in the hospitality industry. He works long and irregular hours and says that he and his mates use 'speed' to keep up the pace. He says he's used it ever since he was serving in Timor. Lately though he finds his concentration is going and even though he is increasing the doses he uses and now injects, he just isn't keeping up as well as he used to. He thinks there's a conspiracy at work to get rid of him and his friends seem to have turned against him. He is taking frequent sick days and using cannabis to come down from the speed.

His girlfriend has been at him to cut down 'using' because she has noticed changes in his behaviour and it is affecting their relationship. She is concerned because he has become emotionally withdrawn and suspicious of what she does.

Ben sees his GP to ask about his weight loss and headaches. He says he's tried a number of pharmacies but the stuff they give him doesn't work. He also can't sleep. Ben does not think he has a problem with taking amphetamines, it's just part of his lifestyle.

Points for discussion

- The GPs ability to engage with Ben is a vital first step. How might you go about this?
- What are the important issues here?
- What are the risks and what assessments might you use?
- What is the diagnosis or problem that carries the most risk?
- What interventions would be useful at this consultation?
- What support could local health services, including VVCS offer at this point?

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Case study part B - Ben

Ben comes back to the GP saying "Legal Aid told me to see you". Ben was recently charged by the police for assault and possession of an illegal substance. As it's a first offence, he is bailed until the case comes up in a few months time. He has to report to the police station once a week until that time. The courts noted his good record in the services and the time he served in Timor and noted that he was discharged suffering from symptoms of operational stress and subsequently treated for PTSD. The magistrate told him to get medical help for his drug use and to see a counsellor.

Ben has lost his job as a result of the assault and is now injecting speed several times a day for a number of days at a time to help him cope. He is showing signs of mild psychosis and says he thinks Timorese soldiers are shadowing him.

Points for discussion

- What particular challenges are there with this case?
- What additional information would you seek from Ben?
- How might this change your management?
- How could Ben be effectively managed using the services and resources in your local area?
- What particular help can VVCS provide?

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Facilitator's notes

Part A

- Emphasise the importance of establishing rapport with Ben as a vital first step.
- Discuss 'speed' – what forms of 'speed' are there and what is Ben using?
- What is the significance of Ben's cannabis use?
- How would you assess Ben for both his mental health and drug use?
- Does Ben want to quit using?
- Discuss safe injecting practices and safe injecting equipment to minimise the risk of hepatitis C and HIV transmission through sharing of needles.
- What needle syringe services are available in your area. How can Ben access them? What other options might there be (eg Narcotics Anonymous, other peer support groups)?
- What advice can be offered to Ben about his physical health?
- What support services are available for Ben's girlfriend? Inform participants of Family Drug Support (national contact number 1300 368 186)

Part B

- What significance does Ben's service history have? Discuss PTSD.
- What services can VVCS offer at this time – is it possible (with Ben's permission) to obtain previous health records?
- What would the role of local health service providers be in treating Ben?
- Encourage participants to identify immediate treatment for Ben AND to map a pathway for longer term care.
- Discuss the procedures for voluntary and involuntary scheduling under the Mental Health Act or State/Territory equivalent.
- Discuss the impact Ben's legal issues will have on his ongoing health care.
- VVCS unable to provide Court Report