

---

# Unit Specification

UMH9 – Understanding bipolar disorder

Unit reference number: M/618/6289

**Level: 2**

**Guided Learning (GL) hours: 9**

## Overview

Learners will develop an understanding of bipolar disorder. Learners will explore what is meant by the terms bipolar disorder, the possible causes and the impact that this mental health disorder has on the individual and others. Learners will also explore the management and treatment options that are available for people suffering from bipolar disorder.

## Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit, learners will:

LO1 Understand bipolar disorder

LO2 Understand the causes of bipolar disorder

LO3 Understand how bipolar disorder can affect individuals and others

LO4 Understand how to manage and support people with bipolar disorder

---

# Unit content

## LO1 Understand bipolar disorder

### Know what is meant by the term bipolar disorder

#### Taught content

- Bipolar disorder is a mental health condition that affects your moods, energy and activity levels which can swing from one extreme to another. The condition used to be known as manic depression
- People with bipolar disorder have episodes of:
  - Depression – feeling very low and lethargic
  - Mania – feeling very high and overactive
- These extreme episodes may last for several weeks or longer, differentiating bipolar disorder from simple mood swings
- The extreme changes in mood can be very distressing for an individual
- A doctor may diagnose an individual with a particular type of bipolar disorder for example:
  - Bipolar I
  - Bipolar II
  - Cyclothymia
- <https://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Bipolar-disorder/>
- Bipolar facts and figures (bipolar UK, <https://www.bipolaruk.org/faqs/bipolar-the-facts>)
  - 1% to 2% of the population experience a lifetime prevalence of bipolar and recent research suggests as many as 5% of us are on the bipolar spectrum
  - Bipolar is one of the UK's commonest long-term conditions with almost as many people living with bipolar as cancer
  - Bipolar increases an individual's risk of suicide by up to 20 times
  - The World Health Organisation identifies bipolar as one of the top causes of lost years of life and health in 15 to 44 year olds

### Know the general signs and symptoms associated with bipolar disorder

#### Taught content

- During a period of depression, your symptoms may include:
  - feeling sad, hopeless or irritable most of the time
  - lacking energy
  - difficulty concentrating and remembering things
  - loss of interest in everyday activities
  - feelings of emptiness or worthlessness
  - feelings of guilt and despair
  - feeling pessimistic about everything
  - self-doubt
  - being delusional, having hallucinations and disturbed or illogical thinking

- lack of appetite
- difficulty sleeping
- waking up early
- suicidal thoughts
- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/bipolar-disorder/symptoms/>
- Behaviour during a period of depression may include:
  - not doing things you normally enjoy
  - having trouble sleeping, or sleeping too much
  - eating too little or too much
  - misusing drugs or alcohol
  - being withdrawn or avoiding people
  - being less physically active than usual
  - self-harming, or attempting suicide
  - <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/bipolar-disorder/bipolar-moods-symptoms/>
- The manic phase of bipolar disorder symptoms may include:
  - feeling very happy, elated or overjoyed
  - talking very quickly
  - feeling full of energy
  - feeling self-important
  - feeling full of great new ideas and having important plans
  - being easily distracted
  - being easily irritated or agitated
  - being delusional, having hallucinations and disturbed or illogical thinking
  - not feeling like sleeping
  - not eating
  - doing things that often have disastrous consequences – such as spending large sums of money on expensive and sometimes unaffordable items
  - making decisions or saying things that are out of character and that others see as being risky or harmful
  - Individuals may experience periods of depression and periods of mania with interim periods of “normal” mood. The patterns differ for different individuals and each have different time frames
  - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/bipolar-disorder/symptoms/>
- Behaviour during a period of mania may include:
  - being more active than usual
  - talking a lot, speaking very quickly, or not making sense to other people
  - being very friendly
  - saying or doing things that are inappropriate and out of character
  - sleeping very little or not at all
  - being rude or aggressive

- misusing drugs or alcohol
- spending money excessively or in a way that is unusual
- losing social inhibitions
- taking serious risks with safety
- <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/bipolar-disorder/bipolar-moods-symptoms/>

## LO2 Understand the causes of bipolar disorder

### Know the triggers and possible causes of bipolar disorder

#### Taught content

- Bipolar disorder is multi-faceted with genetic, environmental and psychosocial factors playing a role
  - The Discovery of Clinically Applicable Biomarkers for Bipolar Disorder: A Review of Candidate and Proteomic Approaches <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33014755/>
- Causes
  - Genetics – research suggests that bipolar disorder can be in part explained through heredity
  - Brain structure and function – chemical imbalances between 1 or more neurotransmitters
- Triggers – stressful events can trigger the symptoms of bipolar disorder. For example:
  - The breakdown of a relationship
  - Physical, sexual or emotional abuse
  - The death of a close family member or loved one
  - Physical illness
  - Sleep disturbances
  - Overwhelming problems in everyday life, such as problems with money, work or relationships
  - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/bipolar-disorder/causes/>
- Conditions that can co-occur with bipolar disorder
  - Psychosis – people with bipolar disorder also have psychotic symptoms
  - ADHD
  - Eating disorders
  - Misuse of alcohol and drugs

## LO3 Understand how bipolar disorder can affect individuals and others

### Know how bipolar disorder can affect individuals

#### Taught content

- Consider the symptoms detailed of both the manic and depressive phases. These will also affect a person's
  - Self-esteem, self-value and confidence
  - Relationships
  - Employment prospects
  - Access to care. In extreme cases the individual maybe sectioned under the Mental Health Act
  - Physical state
  - Financial affairs
- Individuals experiencing bipolar may also experience psychotic episodes. Psychotic symptoms can mean seeing and hearing things that feel real but don't exist. These are termed delusions (such as paranoia) and hallucinations (such as hearing voices)
- Not everyone with a diagnosis of bipolar disorder experiences psychosis, but some people do. It's more common during manic episodes, but can happen during depressive episodes too. These kinds of experiences can feel very real
- <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/bipolar-disorder/bipolar-moods-symptoms/>
- The stigma attached to mental health conditions such as these will also have an effect on the person's life due other people's perceptions and lack of understanding of the condition

### Know how bipolar disorder can affect others

#### Taught content

- Bipolar disorder is expressed in a wide ranging way between individuals and episodes (Refer to the behaviours that maybe displayed in phases of depression and mania). The behaviour displayed by somebody with this condition can be very distressing for others. A lack of understanding can cause even more distress
- During episodes of illness, the personalities of people with bipolar disorder may change, and they may become abusive or even violent. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/bipolar-disorder/living-with/>
- Family members or friends may be faced with a situation that requires immediate medical attention and/or the presence of the police. In extreme cases the individual may have to be sectioned under the Mental Health Act
- During the depressive phase of bipolar disorder, suicidal thoughts are common and some research has shown the risk of suicide for people with bipolar disorder is 15 to 20 times greater than the general population
- Studies have also shown that as many as half of all people with bipolar disorder attempt suicide at least once <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/bipolar-disorder/living-with/>
- If an individual is in crisis where they are feeling suicidal they should attend their nearest accident and emergency department
- Self-harm can also be a factor in phases of bi-polar disorder. This is usually an attempt by the individual to gain control over their lives. This is a very difficult concept for others to understand and can be very upsetting

## LO4 Understand how to manage and support people with bipolar disorder

### Know the ways in which bipolar disorder can be managed

#### Taught content

- If the individual is in a severe phase of the disorder then medical intervention is the initial management. After this phase has passed then there are various strategies available for longer term and self-management. These may include some of:
  - Talking about the condition with family and/or self-help groups/communities such as
    - Bipolar UK
    - Carers UK
    - Mind
    - Rethink
    - Samaritans
    - SANE
  - Accessing Community mental health teams (CMHT)
  - Make a Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP). The idea of these is to be able to stay well and achieve what you would like to achieve. It is an analysis of your situation and how you can affect it. It also can have embedded in it a crisis action plan. This is a plan whereby you chose contacts, whether friends or family to have an outline of your preferred management strategy should crisis occur
  - Stay active and eat well. This has a multitude of benefits:
    - Can reduce some of the symptoms of bipolar, particularly the depression phase
    - Gives focus and a routine
    - Can limit weight gain which is often a side effect of medication.
    - Some medications can increase risk of diabetes or increase symptoms in those that have it. Exercise can help this
  - Avoid alcohol and drugs
    - Both have well-known harmful physical and social effects, and are not a substitute for treatment and good healthcare
    - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/bipolar-disorder/living-with/>

### Know the treatment options available for people experiencing bipolar disorder

#### Taught content

- There is a wide range of approaches for treatments and choice will depend on a number of factors such as type of bipolar, current circumstances and availability of treatment
- Psychological therapies. These include talking therapies such as:
  - Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). CBT is a talking therapy that can help to manage problems by changing the way you think and behave
  - Interpersonal therapy (IPT). Interpersonal therapy is a talking therapy that focuses on you and your relationships with other people
  - <https://www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/about-mental-illness/learn-more-about-conditions/bipolar-disorder/>

- Medication
  - A GP or other health professional who specialises in this condition has access to a range of medications often referred to as ‘mood stabilisers’. The medications are effective for different phases, i.e. mania and depression
  - The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) give clear guidelines about how these are administered and monitored. The patient should be informed and collaborate in their medication choice when appropriate
  - <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg185/chapter/recommendations#how-to-use-medication>

## Know the organisations available to help with the management and support of bipolar disorder

### Taught content

- Primary care. This is the entry level of care the NHS. You can get treatment and support from primary care services if you have mild or moderate mental health problems. Primary services include:
  - Your GP
  - Your local link worker through your GP
  - Talking therapy from your local Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) service
- Community mental health teams (CMHT)
  - A mental health team (MHT) is part of community care. Community care is secondary care provided by the NHS which means you get treatment outside of a hospital stay. You may be referred to an MHT if you need more support with your mental health. MHT's are staffed with professionals such as:
    - Psychiatrists
    - Social workers
    - Community psychiatric nurses (CPNs)
    - Psychologists
    - Occupational therapists
    - Care Coordinators
    - Approved Mental Health Professionals (AMHP)
    - Other professionals. Other people will also make up the team. For example, managers, psychotherapists, support workers and administrators
    - <https://www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/living-with-mental-illness/treatment-and-support/nhs-mental-health-teams-mhts/>
- Mind – provides advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem <https://www.mind.org.uk/>
- Bipolar UK – the only national charity dedicated to empowering individuals and families affected by bipolar <https://www.bipolaruk.org/what-we-do>

### **Guide to taught content**

The content contained within the unit specification is not prescriptive or exhaustive but is intended to provide helpful guidance to teachers and learners with the key areas that will be covered within the unit and relating to the kinds of evidence that should be provided for each assessment objective specific to the unit learning outcomes.

# Assessment requirements

## 1. Knowledge outcomes

Learners must complete an external theory examination for this unit. This will consist of a multiple-choice question paper which is mapped to the relevant assessment criteria stated below. The theory examination will test the knowledge and understanding from across learning outcomes 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Learners should use the unit content sections of this unit to aid revision since exam questions will test the full breadth of content over time.

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Assessment requirement
LO1 Understand bipolar disorder	1.1. Describe what is meant by the term bipolar disorder	External theory examination
	1.2. Outline the general signs and symptoms associated with bipolar disorder	

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Assessment requirement
LO2 Understand the causes of bipolar disorder	2.1. Describe the triggers and possible causes of bipolar disorder	External theory examination

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Assessment requirement
LO3 Understand how bipolar disorder can affect individuals and others	3.1. Describe how bipolar disorder can affect individuals	External theory examination
	3.2. Describe how bipolar disorder can affect others	

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Assessment requirement
LO4 Understand how to manage and support people with bipolar disorder	4.1. Describe the ways in which bipolar disorder can be managed	External theory examination
	4.2. Describe the treatment options available for people experiencing bipolar disorder	
	4.3. Outline two organisations available to help with the management and support of bipolar disorder	

## Document History

Version	Issue Date	Changes	Role
v1.0	01/04/2021	First published	Product and Regulation Manager