

Mental Health Assessment: Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) Case Study

Patient Profile

- **Name:** Sarah Thompson
- **Age:** 25 years old
- **Gender:** Female
- **Occupation:** University student
- **Chief Complaint:** Persistent worry, difficulty concentrating, and physical tension for the past six months

Presenting Symptoms

Sarah reports experiencing **excessive anxiety and constant worry** about her academic performance, personal relationships, and future uncertainties. She describes frequent episodes of:

- **Restlessness and irritability**, often feeling on edge without a specific reason.
- **Difficulty concentrating** on studies, struggling to retain information and complete assignments on time.
- **Muscle tension, headaches, and fatigue**, often feeling physically drained despite adequate rest.
- **Difficulty sleeping (insomnia)** due to racing thoughts, waking up frequently throughout the night.
- **Increased heart rate and occasional shortness of breath** during stressful situations such as exams or social interactions.

Sarah denies any history of **substance abuse or suicidal ideation**, but she reports feeling **emotionally overwhelmed and mentally exhausted**. She has withdrawn from social activities and struggles to maintain personal relationships due to her constant state of worry.

Assessment and Diagnosis

During the **Mental Status Examination (MSE)**, Sarah appears **alert and oriented**, but she exhibits noticeable signs of anxiety. She maintains eye contact but frequently sighs and rubs her hands. Her speech is normal in tone and pace but is marked by a **pattern of negative thinking and self-doubt**.

- **Mood:** Anxious and worried.
- **Affect:** Congruent with mood, with a tense facial expression.
- **Thought Process:** Organized but dominated by excessive worries.
- **Cognition:** Intact, but her attention span is reduced due to persistent worry.
- **Insight & Judgment:** Good insight into her symptoms but struggles to manage them effectively.

Using the **Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7) scale**, Sarah scores **15/21**, indicating **moderate to severe anxiety**. She meets the criteria for **Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)**.

according to the **DSM-5**, characterized by excessive worry occurring most days for at least six months, along with physical and cognitive symptoms.

Nursing Interventions & Management

1. Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) Techniques

- **Thought Reframing:** Encouraged Sarah to identify and challenge irrational thoughts, replacing them with balanced and realistic perspectives.
- **Journaling and Mindfulness:** Introduced journaling to help Sarah track anxiety triggers and reflect on patterns. Mindfulness techniques such as guided meditation were recommended to increase self-awareness and relaxation.

2. Relaxation and Coping Strategies

- **Deep Breathing Exercises:** Taught Sarah diaphragmatic breathing to regulate her heart rate and reduce panic episodes.
- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR):** Helped Sarah systematically tense and relax different muscle groups to alleviate physical symptoms of anxiety.
- **Physical Activity:** Recommended at least **30 minutes of light exercise (such as yoga or walking) per day** to promote endorphin release and stress reduction.

3. Medication & Referral

- **Psychiatric Evaluation:** Discussed with Sarah the potential benefits of medication and referred her to a psychiatrist for evaluation.
- **Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs):** The psychiatrist prescribed **Sertraline (Zoloft) 25 mg/day**, with plans for gradual titration based on Sarah's response. SSRIs were chosen for their efficacy in treating generalized anxiety with minimal side effects.
- **Counseling and Support Groups:** Referred Sarah to a university-based counseling center for structured therapy sessions. Suggested joining an **anxiety support group** to share experiences and coping strategies.

4. Lifestyle Modifications & Follow-Up

- **Sleep Hygiene:** Advised maintaining a **consistent sleep schedule**, avoiding screen exposure before bedtime, and limiting caffeine intake.
- **Nutritional Guidance:** Encouraged a balanced diet rich in **omega-3 fatty acids, magnesium, and B vitamins**, which are known to support mental health.
- **Social Support:** Recommended Sarah reconnect with close friends and engage in enjoyable hobbies to counter social withdrawal.
- **Regular Monitoring:** Scheduled **bi-weekly follow-ups** to track her symptoms, medication adherence, and overall progress.

Outcomes & Prognosis

After **six weeks of treatment**, Sarah reported **significant improvements in managing her anxiety**:

- **Reduced frequency and intensity of anxious thoughts.**
- **Better sleep quality** with fewer interruptions.
- **Improved concentration and productivity** in academic tasks.
- **Enhanced emotional regulation**, with fewer episodes of irritability and restlessness.
- **Greater engagement in social activities**, feeling more confident in personal interactions.

With continued **CBT therapy, lifestyle modifications, and medication adherence**, Sarah's prognosis remains **positive**. The primary goal is to equip her with **long-term coping strategies** to maintain emotional stability and prevent future anxiety flare-ups.

Conclusion

This case study highlights the importance of **early mental health assessment and intervention** in managing anxiety disorders. By incorporating a **holistic nursing approach**, including **CBT techniques, medication support, lifestyle modifications, and emotional support**, patients like Sarah can achieve **significant improvements in their mental well-being**. Nurses play a crucial role in providing education, reassurance, and guidance, helping individuals regain control over their lives and fostering resilience in managing anxiety.