

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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COGNITIVE THERAPY AS EFFECTIVE AS DRUG THERAPY FOR TREATING ATYPICAL DEPRESSION

DALLAS – June 2, 1999 – Psychotherapy can be just as effective for treating atypical major depression as the standard drug treatment, which is the monoamine oxidase (MAO) inhibitor phenelzine sulfate, reported UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas researchers in May in the *Archives of General Psychiatry*.

Dr. Robin Jarrett, associate professor of psychiatry, said this is the first time researchers have compared medication and psychotherapy for atypical depression in a randomized, placebo-controlled trial. It is only the second time cognitive therapy for major depression has been tested in a randomized study containing a pill placebo.

“The implication of the study is that cognitive therapy is an effective alternative to MAO inhibitors for patients with major depressive disorder with affective features,” she said. “These findings are important because clinicians and patients now have a tested and effective alternative to pharmacotherapy.”

In the 10-week study, UT Southwestern researchers, led by Jarrett, treated 108 patients experiencing atypical depression. One-third received phenelzine sulfate; one-third received cognitive therapy, which teaches people to examine the relationship between emotions, thoughts and behavior; and one-third received a pill placebo. Fifty-eight percent of patients in both the cognitive therapy group and the phenelzine group responded to treatment. Twenty-eight percent

(MORE)

ATYPICAL DEPRESSION-2

in the placebo group responded positively.

The central feature of atypical depression is that the patient's mood brightens when positive events occur. People with atypical depression may gain weight and spend large amounts of time sleeping. Other symptoms include feeling weighted down or heavy and being extremely sensitive to interpersonal rejection.

"More research on atypical depression treatments still needs to be done, including evaluating the effectiveness of serotonin reuptake inhibitors like Prozac and Zoloft," Jarrett said.

Other UT Southwestern researchers who participated in the study were Drs. Martin Schaffer and Paul Silver, clinical assistant professors of psychiatry; Dr. Greg Eaves, clinical assistant professor of psychology; Dr. Rodger Kobes, clinical associate professor of psychiatry; Dr. Dolores Kraft, assistant professor of psychiatry; Dr. Donald McIntire, assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology; and Dr. Paul Orsulak, professor of psychiatry.

The National Institute of Mental Health provided funding for the research, and Parke-Davis donated the medication and matching placebo.

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