

Depression treatment diagnostics studied

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U.S. scientists say they are working on research that might lead to the first diagnostic test to guide the treatment of depression.

Finding an effective treatment for depression is often a matter of trial and error. Although there are numerous drugs available, finding the right one -- or right combination -- can be a long and frustrating process.

Studies released earlier this year suggested about 60 percent of patients are not helped by the first drug they are given. Because antidepressants have a delayed onset of action, the doctor and patient don't learn if a given drug is effective for several weeks after the drug is prescribed.

Now Weill Cornell Medical College researchers -- led by psychiatrist Francis Lee -- say they are creating a diagnostic test involving sampling the patient's DNA and looking for a variant of the gene coding a protein called "Brain Derived Neurotrophic Factor" or BDNF.

If the patient has the variant, then it is unlikely the patient would respond to treatment with the most commonly used class of drugs, which include fluoxetine (Prozac), citalopram (Celexa), paroxetine (Paxil) and sertraline (Zoloft).

The research is detailed in the journal Science.

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