

Psychotherapy may improve course of medical disorders

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Somatic symptom disorders are common, disabling and costly. This meta-analysis indicates how short-term dynamic psychotherapy may be effective on physical symptoms, psychiatric symptoms and social adjustment, even in the long-term. Future research should include high-quality randomized and clinical effectiveness studies with attention to healthcare use and costs.

In the current issue of *Psychotherapy and [Psychosomatics](#)* a meta-analysis indicates how short-term dynamic psychotherapy may be helpful in the setting of medical disease.

Somatic symptom disorders are common, disabling and costly. Individually provided short-term psychodynamic psychotherapies (STPP) have shown promising results. However, the effectiveness of STPP for somatic symptom disorders has not been reviewed. A group of Canadian investigators undertook a systematic review of randomized controlled trials and controlled before and after studies. The outcomes included psychological symptoms, physical symptoms, social-occupational function, healthcare utilization and treatment continuation. A total of 23 studies met the inclusion criteria and covered a broad range of somatic disorders. Thirteen were RCTs and 10 were case series with pre-post outcome assessment.

Of the included studies, 21/23 (91.3%), 11/12 (91.6%), 16/19 (76.2%) and 7/9 (77.8%) reported significant or possible effects on physical symptoms, psychological symptoms, social-occupational function and

healthcare utilization respectively. Meta-analysis was possible for 14 studies and revealed significant effects on physical symptoms, psychiatric symptoms and social adjustment which were maintained in long-term follow-up. Random-effect modeling attenuated some of these relationships. There was a 54% greater treatment retention in the STPP group versus controls.

At the end of the investigations, the Authors concluded that STPP may be effective for a range of medical and physical conditions underscoring the role of patients' emotional adjustment in overall health. Future research should include high-quality randomized and clinical effectiveness studies with attention to healthcare use and costs.

More information: Abbass, A. ; Kisely, S. ; Kroenke, K. Short-Term Psychodynamic Psychotherapy for Somatic Disorders. *Psychother Psychosom* 2009;78:265-274

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