

Future-Directed Therapy helps depression patients cultivate optimistic outlook

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Patients with major depression do better by learning to create a more positive outlook about the future, rather than by focusing on negative thoughts about their past experiences, researchers at Cedars-Sinai say after developing a new treatment that helps patients do this.

While Major [Depressive Disorder](#) patients traditionally undergo cognitive-behavior [therapy](#) care that seeks to alter their irrational, [negative thoughts](#) about past [experiences](#), patients who were treated with the newly-developed Future-Directed Therapy™ demonstrated significant improvement in depression and anxiety, as well as improvement in overall reported quality of life, the researchers found.

Results were published recently in the peer-reviewed journal *CNS Neuroscience & Therapeutics*.

"Recent imaging studies show that depressed patients have reduced functioning in the regions of the brain responsible for optimism," said Jennice Vilhauer, PhD, study author and clinical director of Adult Outpatient Programs for the Cedars-Sinai Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences. "Also, people with depression tend to have fewer skills to help them develop a better future. They have less ability to set goals, problem solve or plan for future events."

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated one in 10 American adults meet the diagnostic criteria for depression.

Anand Pandya, MD, interim chair of Cedars-Sinai's Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences, said, "Future-Directed Therapy is designed to reduce depression by teaching people the skills they need to think more positively about the future and take the action required to create positive future experiences. This is the first study that demonstrates this intervention intended to increase positive expectations about the future can reduce symptoms of Major Depressive Disorder."

When people talk only about the negative aspects of their lives, it causes them to focus more attention on what makes them unhappy, Vilhauer said. "Talking about what makes you unhappy in life doesn't generate the necessary thinking patterns or action needed to promote a state of thriving and create a more positive future," Vilhauer said. "Future-Directed Therapy helps people shift their attention constructing visions of what they want more of in the future and it helps them develop the skills that they will need to eventually get there."

In the study conducted at Cedars-Sinai, 16 adult patients diagnosed with [Major Depressive Disorder](#) attended future-directed group therapy sessions led by a licensed psychologist twice a week for 10 weeks. Each week, patients read a chapter from a Future-Directed Therapy manual and completed worksheets aimed at improving certain skills, such as goal-setting. Another group of 17 patients diagnosed with depression underwent standard cognitive group therapy. The study team measured the severity of depression and anxiety symptoms, and quality of life before and after treatment, using the Quick Inventory of Depressive Symptoms, the Beck Anxiety Inventory, and the Quality-of-Life Enjoyment and Satisfaction Questionnaire short form.

Results include:

-- Patients in the Future-Directed Therapy group experienced on average a 5.4 point reduction in their depressive symptoms on the Quick

Inventory of Depressive Symptoms scale, compared to a two point reduction in the cognitive therapy group.

-- Patients in the Future-Directed Therapy group on average reported a 5.4 point reduction in anxiety symptoms on the Beck Anxiety Inventory, compared to a reduction of 1.7 points in the cognitive therapy group.

-- Patients in the Future-Directed Therapy group reported on average an 8.4 point improvement in their self-reported quality of life on the Quality of Life Enjoyment and Satisfaction scale, compared to a 1.2 point improvement in the cognitive therapy group.

Provided by Cedars-Sinai Medical Center

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