

New blood test may help diagnose depression

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The World Health Organisation has determined that depressive disorders are the leading cause of disability worldwide. The recurrent and chronic forms of depression account for the bulk of the problem.

Developed by researchers at the Northwestern University, the new blood test measures blood levels of nine different RNA molecules that seem to differ significantly between healthy people and people suffering from [depression](#). Science magazine reports that although test is still a long way from clinical usefulness, it represents the first objective measurement of a mental disorder in adults.

The test, outlined in a study published in *Translational Psychiatry*, has been used to accurately diagnose depression in a small sample of people,

and researchers hope that in the future it could be used on a widespread basis. Newsweek reports that, besides accurately diagnosing depression, the technique may also be able to tell who could benefit from talk therapy and who may be vulnerable to the condition in the first place.

Researchers recruited 32 patients who were diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorders (MDD), as well as 32 non-depressed patients to participate as a control group. Medical Daily reports that after 18 weeks of [cognitive behavior therapy](#) for the patients with depression, the research team was able to highlight markers in the patients and determine which ones were responding well to therapy by seeing actual physical changes in their blood tests.

After the period of therapy sessions ended, about 40 percent of the patients were no longer depressed. Co-author of the study, Eva Redei, told Newsweek that interestingly, the [patients](#) who recovered had a unique 'fingerprint' of RNA levels in their [blood](#). This suggests that the test might be able to shed light on who could benefit from this form of treatment.

Medical Daily sees the objectivity of the test as a key step forward: 'Currently, depression is only diagnosed through a number of subjective one-on-one observations of a patient's behavior and mood with a qualified therapist, along with self-reported events and feelings. A [blood test](#) may eventually be able to test for levels of severity or direction for treatment depending on the types of biomarkers that are highlighted on the [test](#)'.

However Newsweek sounds a note of caution. It advises that the results are preliminary, and not close to ready for use. It also quotes Todd Essig, a clinical psychologist in New York, who insists that diagnosing depression the 'old-fashioned way' through an interview works quite well, and should only take 10 to 15 minutes.

For more information, please visit: europepmc.org/articles/pmc4150241

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