

People who trust their doctor tend to feel better

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Credit: Petr Kratochvil/public domain

Confidence in doctors, therapists and nursing staff leads to an improvement in subjectively perceived complaints, satisfaction and quality of life in patients. This is the conclusion of a meta-analysis by psychologists at the University of Basel, published in the journal *PLOS ONE*.

Trust in doctors, therapists and nursing staff is a key requirement when treating patients, and is already laid down as a principle in the ethical guidelines and professional codes of each clinical field. Researchers from the Department of Psychology at the University of Basel and Harvard Medical School examined the question of whether trust, in addition to this ethical value, also produces clinical effects. The psychologists conducted a meta-analysis of 47 studies from Europe, Asia, North America and Australia which deal with the relationship between trust and an improved state of health in people undergoing medical treatment.

A positive impact on wellbeing

The results show that the confidence which patients have in medical personnel does not produce a clear-cut result: there was no proven effect when using objective clinical parameters or when doctors assessed the state of health. Trust nevertheless had a positive effect on the satisfaction, health-related behavior, quality of life and subjectively perceived complaints of those being treated.

Trust as an important part of clinical education and practice

By empirically confirming that trust in medical personnel has a significant effect on patients, the analysis bolsters the demand for relationships of trust in [clinical](#) environments. "The results of our meta-analysis are a clear indication of the value of patients' trust in their medical professionals. They emphasize the need to make developing and safeguarding trust an integral part of [clinical education](#) and practice," says Professor Jens Gaab, co-author of the study.

Further research is needed

Previous research has already attempted to explain how trust could influence health outcomes, whether through greater honesty from patients, a potential placebo effect, or through a greater adherence to doctors' instructions. Further research is still necessary to find a comprehensive explanation for these mechanisms, however.

More information: Johanna Birkhäuser et al, Trust in the health care professional and health outcome: A meta-analysis, *PLOS ONE* (2017). DOI: [10.1371/journal.pone.0170988](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0170988)

Provided by University of Basel

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