

CS07-04 - PHARMACOTHERAPY DURING LONG-TERM PSYCHOTHERAPY

J.Horacek¹, J.Prasko²

¹Prague Psychiatric Center and 3rd Medical Faculty of Charles University, Prague, ²Medical Faculty of Charles University, Olomouc, Czech Republic

Combination treatments including psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy are considered for the majority of mental disorders more effective than monotherapy alone. The effects of psychotherapy added to pharmacotherapy are significantly better than pharmacotherapy alone in patients with depressive and neurotic disorders as reported in several meta-analyses. Psychotherapy in combination with antidepressants significantly improves response rates and for studies longer than 12 weeks, the combined therapy also significantly reduces dropout rates, improves adherence, social functioning and quality of life. Data from controlled trials suggesting that psychological interventions also offer prophylactic effects by providing patients with coping skills to prevent or delay relapse.

However, the inverse question related to the additive effect of pharmacotherapy to long-term psychotherapy is not yet systematically elaborated. In addition, only few studies examined how pharmacotherapy coupled with psychotherapy could produce a long-term neurobiological effect by improving the response to negative and stress events.

Studies in depression indicate that additional effects from providing combined psychotherapy and pharmacological treatment could produce a protective effect on stress regulation systems as shown in a diurnal cortisol pattern. Congruently, the neuroimaging analyses have documented that antidepressants and psychotherapy exert similar impact on regional brain activity. Our group compared the changes of regional brain metabolism (¹⁸FDG PET) induced by cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and antidepressants in patients with panic disorder. Changes in ¹⁸FDG uptake after the treatment either with CBT or with antidepressants were similar in number of brain areas, with prominent right-left difference (decrease of metabolism in the right frontal and temporal lobe, and increase in the left hemisphere). These findings support the regionally specific additive neurobiological effect if both therapeutic approaches are combined.

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