

Cognitive Therapy for Depression May Be More Cost-Effective Than Prozac

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Cognitive therapy and Prozac (fluoxetine) have both been found to be effective treatments for depression across multiple clinical trials. The combination of these two treatments has also proven to be effective. With increasing pressure for cost containment prompted by managed care, effective treatments must also be cost-effective. A recent study (Antonuccio, Thomas, & Danton, 1997) compared the cost-effectiveness of cognitive therapy and Prozac, either alone or in combination, for the treatment of depression. Cost-effectiveness was investigated across three levels. The first level reflected the direct costs of the treatment to the patient or third-party payer. Such costs included lost personal wages. The second level involved direct costs to the community, and the third level was indirect costs to society. The study also compared individual versus group formats of cognitive therapy. The time frame investigated was two years from initiation of treatment.

The study findings showed that Prozac alone may result in 33% higher expected costs compared to individual cognitive therapy. The combination treatment had 23% higher costs than cognitive therapy alone (individual or group format). It was predicted that group cognitive therapy would be more cost effective than individual therapy. The actual savings using the group format was only 2% relative to individual sessions. This was attributed to the fact that group therapy in this study lasted longer than individual therapy.

The sources of the cost differences between the cognitive therapy and Prozac treatments were also examined. The primary sources were found to be medication costs, comorbidity costs of other health problems, and clinical success probabilities. The study authors conclude that cognitive therapy is both clinically effective and competitively cost effective in the treatment of depression.

Reference

Antonuccio, D.O., Thomas, M., & Danton, W.G. (1997). A cost-effectiveness analysis of cognitive behavior therapy and fluoxetine (Prozac) in the treatment of depression. *Behavior Therapy*, 28, 187-210.