

# Consumer reports



In spite of CBS and consumer reports that talk therapy works faster than drug therapy in treating individuals with mental illness or erectile dysfunction more studies need to be done to show a scientific basis for these opinions. Both the media and the Consumer Report magazine based their statements on a 2004 Consumer Report survey composed of 3, 000 consumers-hardly enough to draw the conclusion that the data represented a " landmark study with worldwide impact."(1)

The headlines of the article read: Depression: Drug v. Talk Therapy; One Appears to Work Faster, but the Other May be More Effective. Based on the survey the magazine stated that a " combination of talk therapy and drugs worked best for treatment of depression and anxiety. But those whose treatment consisted of mostly talk therapy did almost as well if they had 13 or more visits with the therapist." (1)

More scientific data is needed before health professionals can determine whether or not this is true. Both problems are much more complex than the article indicates. Either can be strictly psychological and, therefore, benefit more from talk therapy than drugs. They may also stem from a strictly physical problem and, therefore would appear to benefit more from drugs. Or the third scenario would be that they are both caused by a combination of the physical and psychological. If this is true, then a healthy response to treatment would respond better to both treatments: talk therapy and drugs. An article by the American Journal of Psychiatry in 1999 expressed another opinion:

Some early analyses seemed to suggest that medications were better if the client were severely depressed. Giving away their pro-drug bias, the American Psychiatric Association jumped on the results and recommended

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drugs as the first line of treatment in people who are severely depressed. Now, all too quietly, the truth emerges. Not based on a single study, this "mega-analysis" of 4 separate studies comparing CBT to anti-depressants found a slight but non-significant difference favoring the therapy over drugs! The authors conclude, " There are no empirical grounds for favoring either form of therapy and that the unique needs of the individual should continue to guide therapeutic choices."(2)

Not only do health professionals need to become better educated about the causes and treatments for mental illness and erectile dysfunction so do the individuals affected by them. Whatever the root causes may be for both problems the patient needs to participate in his or her own care.

In today's world, too many doctors are not qualified to treat mental illness, especially that which is severe. Unfortunately these are the doctors who tend to merely prescribe drugs to the patient. This can be especially dangerous to the person suffering from mental illness. In fact, the doctor without sufficient knowledge about mental illness may prescribe a drug which will exacerbate the illness. In some cases, especially in those involving youths, this may result in physical harm to the patient, and sometimes result in their death. Such cases are clearly those in which a mental health specialist is needed.

#### Citations

Consumer Reports teleconference, Sept. 7, 2004. Consumer Reports, October 2004, pp 22-29. News release, Consumer Reports.

DeRubeis, R. J. et al. (1999). Medications versus cognitive behavior therapy for severely depressed outpatients. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 156, 1007-1013.