New Hope for Depression

The longer depression goes on the more difficult it can be to recover from it in psychotherapy. This may be because long-standing depressions set up patterns of thinking and behaving that are harder to change.

If you suffer from long-standing depression, there is good news. A new form of psychotherapy has been developed called Cognitive Behavioral Analysis System of Psychotherapy (or CBASP), and it is the first psychotherapy that research has found effective in chronic depression. Specifically, the therapy works as well as medication in most people, and can also help make medication work better. In people who experienced abuse or neglect as children this therapy worked much better than medication.

Several counselors at the Mood Treatment Center are experienced in CBASP. The therapy should not be confused with the more well-known Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). CBT is also effective for depression, but not as effective for chronic depressions.

Below is an article from the Washington Post which explains the therapy. You can also learn more about the therapy on the website www.cbasp.org or through the book *Patient's Manual for CBASP* (available on amazon).

–Chris Aiken, MD, updated 5/2/12

A Lasting Cure for Persistent Depression?

Virginia Commonwealth University Professor James P. McCullough, Jr. is training mental health professionals nationwide to treat the most intractably depressed patients with a scientifically validated but little-known form of therapy. Cognitive Behavioral Analysis System of Psychotherapy (CBASP) "is the only method in the world developed specifically for the chronically depressed patient," said McCullough, who has studied the condition for more than two decades and developed the method.

The Condition

Chronic depression, which afflicts 20 million Americans, was considered untreatable until 1980. It often begins at puberty and is rooted in an early traumatic life. Untreated, it can last a lifetime. McCullough said his patients have an average age of 41 and have had symptoms for more than 18 years. "They have an egocentric world view," he said. "The environment can't get in, and they are unable to recognize that their interpersonal actions have consequences. They orbit in a cycle of sameness."

JAMES P. MCCULLOUGH, PHD, FOUNDER OF CBASP

The Treatment

The six-step procedure of one CBASP technique (Situational Analysis) requires patients to focus on a stressful "slice of time" in their lives. They describe what happened, their interpretation of what happened, their behavior and its outcome, and their preferred outcome; then, they look at whether or not they obtained what they wanted in the situation. Past relationships and trauma are explored; the

therapist interacts closely with the patient rather than listening passively. The process is repeated in every session. CBASP compared to traditional Cognitive Therapy is different. It teaches patients that their life dilemma is self-produced and maintained. But McCullough said that CBASP appears to be more effective than Cognitive Therapy for the chronically depressed patient.

"In a repetitive way, we show patients that you create the life problems that you complain of," he said, "and this is accomplished, over time, as patients become aware of how their destructive behavior affects others and how their behavior maintains their depression."

The Research

CBASP was used in the largest study comparing talk therapy and antidepressant medication for chronic depression. In the study, published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (in May 2000), CBASP was shown to be as effective as drugs (a little more than half in each group reported reduced symptoms). When CBASP was combined with medication, 85 percent of the patients who completed the study reported full or partial remission. McCullough calls himself a "man on a mission" to teach this therapy method to others.

–excerpted from an article by Cecilia Capuzzi Simon, *Washington Post*, 11/8/2005.

Patient's Manual for CBASP

JAMES P. McCULLOUGH, Jr.
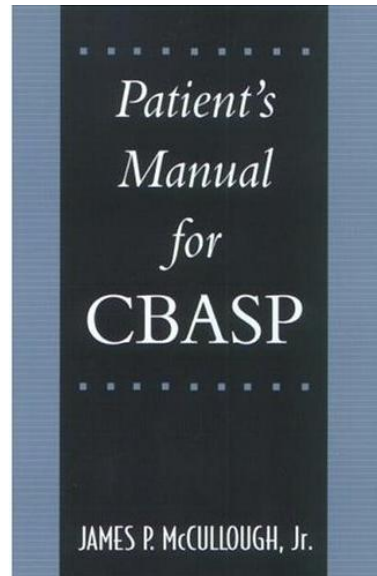
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