Treatments for Mood Disorders

Chapter 9

• Mood disorders – as painful and disabling as they tend to be – respond more successfully to more kinds of treatments than do most other forms of psychological dysfunction
  – This range of treatment options has been a source of reassurance and hope for the millions of people who desire to regain some measure of control over their moods

Treatments for Unipolar Depression

• Around half of persons with unipolar depression (major depressive or dysthymic disorder) receive treatment from a mental health professional each year
  – In addition, many other people in therapy experience depressed feelings as part of another disorder – thus, much of the therapy being done today is for unipolar depression
Treatments for Unipolar Depression

• A variety of treatment approaches are currently in widespread use
  – These can be divided into psychological, sociocultural, and biological approaches

Treatments for Unipolar Depression:
  Psychological Approaches

• Psychological treatments used most often to combat unipolar depression come from three main schools of thought:
  – Psychodynamic – Widely used despite no strong research evidence of its effectiveness
  – Behavioral – Primarily used for mild or moderate depression but practiced less than in past decades
  – Cognitive – Has performed so well in research that it has a large and growing clinical following

Treatments for Unipolar Depression:
  Psychological Approaches

• Psychodynamic therapy
  – Believing that unipolar depression results from unconscious grief over real or imagined losses, compounded by excessive dependence on other people, psychodynamic therapists seek to bring these issues into consciousness and work through them
  – Psychodynamic therapists use the same basic procedures for all psychological disorders:
    • Free association
    • Therapist interpretation
    • Review of past events and feelings
Treatments for Unipolar Depression:
Psychological Approaches

• Psychodynamic therapy
  – Despite successful case reports, researchers have found that long-term psychodynamic therapy is only occasionally helpful in cases of unipolar depression
  – Two features may be particularly limiting:
    • Depressed clients may be too passive or weary to fully participate in subtle therapy discussions
    • Depressed clients may become discouraged and end treatment too early when treatment is unable to provide quick relief
  – Short-term approaches have performed better than traditional approaches

• Behavioral therapy
  – Most behavioral treatment for unipolar depression is modeled after the interventions proposed by Lewinsohn:
    • Reintroduce clients to pleasurable activities and events, often using a weekly schedule
    • Appropriately reinforce their depressive and nondepressive behaviors
      – Use a contingency management approach
    • Help them improve their social skills
  – The behavioral techniques seem to be of only limited help when just one of them is applied
    • When two or more of the techniques are combined, behavioral treatment does seem to reduce depressive symptoms, particularly if mild
    • It is worth noting that Lewinsohn himself has combined behavioral techniques with cognitive strategies in recent years
Treatments for Unipolar Depression: Psychological Approaches

• Cognitive therapy
  – Beck viewed unipolar depression as resulting from a pattern of negative thinking that may be triggered by current upsetting situations
    • Maladaptive attitudes lead people to the “cognitive triad”
      – Repeatedly viewing oneself, the world, and the future in negative ways
    • These biased views combine with illogical thinking to produce automatic thoughts

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Treatments for Unipolar Depression: Psychological Approaches

• Cognitive therapy
  – Beck’s cognitive therapy – which includes a number of behavioral techniques – is designed to help clients recognize and change their negative cognitive processes
  – This approach follows four phases and usually lasts fewer than 20 sessions
  – Phases:
    • Increasing activities and elevating mood
    • Challenging automatic thoughts
    • Identifying negative thinking and biases
    • Changing primary attitudes

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Treatments for Unipolar Depression: Sociocultural Approaches

• Theorists trace the causes of unipolar depression to the broader social structure in which people live and to the roles they are required to play
• Two groups of sociocultural treatments are now widely applied – multicultural approaches and family-social approaches

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Treatments for Unipolar Depression: Sociocultural Approaches

• Multicultural treatments
  – Culture-sensitive approaches increasingly are being combined with traditional forms of psychotherapy to help maximize the likelihood of minority clients overcoming their disorders
  – It also appears that the medication needs of many depressed minority clients are inadequately addressed

• Family-Social Treatments
  – Interpersonal therapy (IPT)
    • This model holds that four interpersonal problems may lead to depression and must be addressed:
      – Interpersonal loss
      – Interpersonal role dispute
      – Interpersonal role transition
      – Interpersonal deficits
    • Studies suggest that IPT is as effective as cognitive therapy for treating depression

• Family-Social Treatments
  – Couple therapy
    • The main type of couple therapy is behavioral marital therapy (BMT)
      – Focus is on developing specific communication and problem-solving skills
    • If marriage is filled with conflict, BMT is as effective as other therapies for reducing depression
Treatments for Unipolar Depression: Biological Approaches

- **Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT)**
  - One of the most controversial forms of treatment
    - It is used frequently because it is an effective and fast-acting intervention
  - The procedure consists of targeted electrical stimulation to cause a brain seizure
    - The usual course of treatment is 6 to 12 sessions spaced over 2 to 4 weeks
  - ECT is clearly effective in treating unipolar depression
    - Studies find improvement in 60%–80% of patients

- **Antidepressant drugs**
  - In the 1950s, two kinds of drugs were found to reduce the symptoms of depression:
    - Monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAO inhibitors)
    - Tricyclics
  - These drugs have been joined in recent years by a third group, the second-generation antidepressants
Treatments for Unipolar Depression: Biological Approaches

• As effective as antidepressant drugs are, it is important to recognize that they do not work for everyone
  – Even the most successful of them fails to help at least 35 percent of clients with depression

• Brain stimulation
  – In recent years, three additional biological approaches have been developed:
    • Vagus nerve stimulation
    • Transcranial magnetic stimulation
    • Deep brain stimulation

How Do the Treatments for Unipolar Depression Compare?

• For most kinds of psychological disorders, no more than one or two treatments, if any, emerge as highly successful
  – Unipolar depression seems to be an exception, responding to any of several approaches
How Do the Treatments for Unipolar Depression Compare?

• Findings from a number of treatment outcome studies suggest that:
  – Cognitive, cognitive-behavioral, interpersonal, and biological therapies are all highly effective treatments for mild to severe unipolar depression
  – Although cognitive, cognitive-behavioral, and interpersonal therapies may lower the likelihood of relapse, they are hardly relapse-proof

How Do the Treatments for Unipolar Depression Compare?

• Findings from a number of treatment outcome studies suggest that:
  – When people with unipolar depression experience significant marital discord, couple therapy tends to be very helpful
  – Depressed people who receive strictly behavioral therapy have shown less improvement than those who receive cognitive, cognitive-behavioral, interpersonal, or biological therapy

How Do the Treatments for Unipolar Depression Compare?

• Findings from a number of treatment outcome studies suggest that:
  – Traditional psychodynamic therapies are less effective than other therapies in treating all levels of unipolar depression
  – A combination of psychotherapy and drug therapy is modestly more helpful to depressed people than either treatment alone
Treatments for Bipolar Disorder

• Until the latter part of the 20th century, people with bipolar disorders were destined to spend their lives on an emotional roller coaster
  – Psychotherapists reported almost no success
  – Antidepressant drugs were of limited help
    • These drugs sometimes triggered manic episodes
  – ECT only occasionally relieved either the depressive or the manic episodes of bipolar disorder

Treatments for Bipolar Disorder: Lithium and Other Mood Stabilizers

• The use of lithium (a metallic element naturally occurring as mineral salt) and other mood-stabilizers has dramatically changed this picture
• All manner of research has attested to the effectiveness of lithium and other mood stabilizers in treating manic episodes

Treatments for Bipolar Disorder: Adjunctive Psychotherapy

• Psychotherapy alone is rarely helpful for persons with bipolar disorder
• Mood stabilizing drugs alone are also not always sufficient
  – 30% or more of patients don’t respond, may not receive the correct dose, and/or may relapse while taking it
• As a result, clinicians often use psychotherapy as an adjunct to lithium (or other medication-based) therapy
Treatments for Bipolar Disorder:
Adjunctive Psychotherapy

- Therapy focuses on medication management, social skills, and relationship issues.
- Few controlled studies have tested the effectiveness of such adjunctive therapy.
  - Growing research suggests that it helps reduce hospitalization, improves social functioning, and increases clients’ ability to obtain and hold a job.