

JB Prins et al. Evidence Based Medicine. November/December (2001) Vol. 6 #6 p 157.

There are many parallels between DRSI and chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS).

Both involve a strong influence of psychological factors in their pathogenesis and in maintaining the chronic state once achieved.

If a treatment works for CFS then it may well work for DRSI.

The journal cited above, produces authoritative summaries of the effectiveness of treatments for specific diseases and disorders. One of its key measures of success is known as Number Needed to Treat (NNT). This is the number of people who should be treated in order to gain one positive change of state. Sadly, many therapies have NNT values less than unity, but therapies continue to be provided on the basis that the benefit gained from the one success outweighs the cost of several failures.

Cognitive behaviour therapy has been assessed in this way.

The experiment involved a randomised controlled trial of CBT vs. guided support vs. treatment as usual. Cases were reassessed at 8 months and 14 month follow up (80% compliance)

Treatment groups were as follows: 93 CBT (16x1 Hour sessions); 94 Guided support (GS) (11 1.5 hour meetings); 91 controls.

Outcome measures included fatigue severity (measured 2 ways, checklist and self-rate) and functional impairment.

Success defined as: fatigue returned to normal.

Check-list fatigue severity was reduced in the CBT group vs. GS and control.

NNT = 4 (95% CI = 4 to 14) and 6 (95% CI = 4 to 15) respectively.

Self-rated fatigue severity results were:

NNT = 3(2,5) and 4(3,9) respectively.

The authors believe the success of this therapy is confirmation that the origin of the disorder has a strong link to psychology.

They also emphasise that CBT is a treatment not a cure.

It is possible that inappropriate psychological intervention could be harmful. So far there have been no reports of there being harm from CBT and no-one yet knows what would be appropriate contraindications.

Comment

NNT values presented here are not immediately attractive. The cost of CBT for this length of time would be around £1000. Savings on claims costs would have to be around £5000 on the successful cases.

