Therapy is just as effective as antidepressants: Can talking really beat drugs in treating depression?

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Friday 11 Dec 2015 7:00 am

Therapy or pills: which would you choose if you were diagnosed with depression?

If you thought it was an obvious choice – you go for the one that’s been proven to work the best, right? – then you’d be wrong, because this week the BMJ published a new [study](http://www.bmj.com/content/351/bmj.h6019) that found both are as effective as the other.

Personally, I would opt for talking therapy – this study specifically looked at cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) – every time.

## **Why? For three reasons:**

## **1**

Being prescribed pills and being sent on your ‘merry’ way doesn’t make you feel like anyone cares. Whereas being referred for therapy, having an assessment to determine which therapy would be most beneficial for you and going on to have several one-on-one sessions feels like real time and effort invested in your mental health. With a professional. Whose sole job is to help you get better.

## **2**

Popping a pill doesn’t treat the root cause of your depression, it merely dulls the symptoms. When you stop taking those pills – which can have minor or major side effects, like any drug – what’s to stop the depression from creeping back in?

You have no ‘tools’ to hand to help you deal with episodes and live with them in the long term. The whole idea behind CBT is to help you see the unhealthy thought patterns that trigger negative thoughts and behaviours. Once you can see them, it gives you a much better chance at changing them, or even stopping them for good.

## **3**

This one is more personal to me but, having already overdosed at 12, I thought there’d be a huge sense of irony if I tried to do it again with antidepressants

Arguably, the best approach is a combo of both and the findings of the study support this. You take antidepressants as a short-term and immediate solution until CBT equips you with the right tools for you to be able to come off the pills and deal with your depression through learnt techniques.

The problem is access to therapy can be a nightmare, as can getting a doctor’s appointment in order to get a referral (especially in time-poor, overcrowded London).

People tend to reach out at crisis point – when the depression has got so bad that it’s disrupting daily life and it’s a struggle to do the simplest of things.

Being told at that stage, when you’re thinking of killing yourself, that the wait for therapy is several months long isn’t much help.

My wait time was extraordinarily long (almost a year) because the initial therapist I met wasn’t for me, then my paperwork was lost, meaning I had to start the process all over again.

But while the wait was too long, ultimately it was worth pushing to get the right therapist.

Choice of therapist is not something that is widely talked about but I believe it is extremely important. Let it be known: just because you’re on the NHS, does not mean you have to accept the first therapist sent your way.

It’s extremely important that you feel comfortable with them so you can get the most out of your therapy. Not wanting to talk to a therapist during talking therapy doesn’t make for a great session.

In the end, I received 20 sessions of CBT. It taught me a lot about myself, my cycle of thoughts and how I can identify and stop them before the full domino effect is in force.

I still use the techniques – the ones that I felt worked best for me – and I haven’t taken a single pill.

That’s just my choice. And choice is important. The study found that patients who were given the choice between antidepressants and therapy felt that they had a sense of control.

Their sense of agency meant they were more likely to report a positive effect on the outcome of the therapy.

It just goes to show how much, for better or for worse, our mind plays a real role in these things.

And, for me at least, it showed me how much I could benefit if I learned to train my mind rather than to drug it.

Read more: <http://metro.co.uk/2015/12/11/therapy-is-just-as-effective-as-antidepressants-can-talking-really-beat-drugs-in-treating-depression-5555448/#ixzz41fPVYWLy>