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REVIEW ARTICLE

Psychotherapy for inflammatory bowel disease: A review and update

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Abstract

Background: Psychotherapy may be a useful intervention for inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) patients. We systematically reviewed all randomized controlled trials that have been performed in psychotherapy for inflammatory bowel disease patients.
Methods: Systematic searches were undertaken on 1 and 8 March, 2012 of studies of psychotherapy for IBD.
Results: Eighteen studies (19 papers) were included in this review. Psychotherapy was found to have minimal effect on measures of anxiety, depression, QOL and disease progression although shows promise in reducing pain, fatigue, relapse rate and hospitalisation, and improving medication adherence. It may also be cost effective.
Conclusions: The effects of psychotherapy on IBD is mixed: future studies should determine whether patient screening or measuring different dependent variables improves outcomes and whether particular psychotherapies are superior over others.

Contents

Abbreviations: TAU, treatment as usual; WLC, waitlist control; QOL, quality of life; CBT, cognitive behavioural therapy; RA, rheumatoid arthritis; IBS, irritable bowel syndrome; CCBT, computerised cognitive behavioural therapy.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Inflammatory bowel disease

Crohn's disease (CD), ulcerative colitis (UC), and indeterminate colitis are chronic relapsing–remitting inflammatory conditions of the intestines which are collectively referred to as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD).[1] The commonest symptoms are bloody stools, diarrhoea, fatigue, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, weight loss and fever.[2] Extra-intestinal symptoms also often occur,[3–6] with anaemia being the most common.[7] IBD has traditionally been thought of as a disease of the Western world,[8–10] although is increasing in prevalence in Asia[11,12] and Latin America.[13,14] The aetiology of IBD remains elusive and complex, although it is thought to relate to genetic,[6,15] environmental,[16,17] and immunological[6] factors. Although not curable, a wide range of treatments are available: medical,[18,19] surgical,[1,20] and dietary manipulation[21,22] are options in the management of IBD.

1.2. Psychotherapy for IBD

The role of psychotherapy in the treatment of IBD is uncertain. A range of studies have reported the profound