

Intensive short-term psychotherapy cost-effective

Use of intensive short-term dynamic psychotherapy - an approach developed at McGill University - can significantly reduce hospital- and physician-related costs, according to a Dalhousie University study.

The study by Dr. Allan Abbass, professor of psychiatry and psychology, and colleagues evaluated the cost-effectiveness of the treatment provided to 890 patients over 10 years by 58 different therapists, including junior therapists and trainees. Patients seen between 1999 and 2008 were the cohort analyzed.

Patients had a broad range of complaints, including somatoform disorders, personality disorders, generalized anxiety and major depression.

Results compared hospital and physician costs pre- and post-treatment within the treated group. Those who received treatment were also compared with those in a control group of referred patients who were never seen.

Among the patients treated with intensive short-term dynamic psychotherapy, hospital costs were reduced by 49.7 per cent while physician costs were reduced by 11.4 per cent. The total cost for physician services and hospital days declined from \$10,270,000 in the three years before treatment to \$5,799,000 for the same period after treatment - a \$5,000 cost reduction per treated patient.

Control patients generated a 7.1 per cent drop in physician costs, but a 7.5 per cent increase in hospital costs, resulting in a net increase of \$1,520 in cost per patient.

Addressing interpersonal problems with treatment correlated with reduced physician visits, physician costs and hospital admissions. Psychotic patients and bipolar patients who received intensive psychotherapy had greater reductions in health-care costs.

Dr. Abbass said the findings indicate the approach should be tried before using medication, electroconvulsive therapy or other long-term therapies, and should be included as an adjunctive treatment for serious mental disorders. "It's simple, short and inexpensive," he said. ●