



January 28, 2010

Psychotherapy reduces repeat ER trips

By CBC News

A staff psychologist has helped an emergency room in Halifax to reduce visits and provide relief for patients whose physical symptoms have no medical explanation.

A psychologist at the QEII Health Sciences Centre in Halifax has helped the emergency room provide relief to repeat patients whose physical symptoms have no medical explanation.

As a result, the patients made fewer visits to the ER, according to new research.

For three out of four patients who arrive at the emergency department with chest pain, doctors find no physical reason for it after a barrage of tests, said Dr. Sam Campbell, chief of emergency at the Halifax Infirmary, part of the QEII.

"Until now, we've been saying 'we can't find anything wrong with you,' or even worse, 'there's nothing wrong with you' and sending them back to continue with the suffering," Campbell said Wednesday.

Last year, the hospital hired a psychologist to interview these patients, offering them "intensive, short-term dynamic psychotherapy."

The relatively short course of treatment helps a person become aware of the emotions affecting the body, said Dr. Allan Abbass, director for the Centre for Emotions and Health in Halifax.

Helping people recognize the link between their physical symptoms and their stress or emotions resulted in a 69 per cent drop in repeat visits to the emergency room by patients in this group. Hospital visits dropped from an average of almost 4.6 visits a year to 1.4 visits a year, the researchers found.

"For example, we saw an 80 per cent drop in panic attacks with a single interview in many cases," said Abbass, whose research is published in the current issue of the Canadian Journal of Emergency Medicine.

The average treatment was 3.8 sessions and patients reported a high degree of satisfaction.

For every 100 people seen by the staff psychologist, there will be 300 fewer emergency visits a year, which adds up to a huge savings and reduction in unnecessary tests, Abbass said.

The project was funded by the Halifax Capital Health's Innovation Fund.

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation



CBC News. Permission granted for up to 5 copies. All rights reserved.

You may forward this article or get additional permissions by typing http://license.icopyright.net/3.8471?icx_id=/2010/01/27/psychotherapy-emergency-room-halifax.html into any web browser. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and CBC logos are registered trademarks of Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The iCopyright logo is a registered trademark of iCopyright, Inc.