

## **Does Psychotherapy Have a Biological Basis?**

Complex and powerful, the human mind functions in a way beyond what is personally decipherable. It controls how people move, think, feel, behave, and even perceive themselves as individuals. Along with the discovery of various mental disorders, science has also been receptive to exploring interventions that could address these functions.

Today, the world of pharmacology has been introducing new drugs that would serve as treatments to manage mental disorders such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and depression. Though these medications have proven their respective efficacy in the modern world, this was not the case in the past during the time of Freud. Mental disturbances used to be addressed through a simple technique known as psychotherapy.

### Overview of Psychotherapy

An old-fashioned counterpart of psychiatric drugs, psychotherapy was conducted to control troubling symptoms to enable the person to function again optimally and perform activities of daily living efficiently. Some of the issues addressed are difficulties in coping with life's hardships, impact of trauma, medical illness, loss or death of a loved one, and other specific mental disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2016). Further, psychotherapies may be complemented with medications or other therapies that may be deemed effective for the further improvement of the patient's outcome.

### The Biological Basis

Studies show that the majority of the people receiving psychotherapy have experienced positive effects such as symptoms relief, fewer medical concerns, improved functionality, and an optimistic outlook in life. These findings could be further supported by the use of brain imaging techniques such as PET/CT scans that could vividly detect changes in the biochemical or anatomical features of the brain (American Psychological Association, n.d.). Various researches have shown that people diagnosed with mental illnesses who received psychotherapy have shown positive changes in their brains. Surprisingly, these remarkable changes were also found to be similar with those who took psychiatric

medications. In addition, recent research revealed that certain neurochemicals such as oxytocin, arginine, vasopressin, and the mu-opioid play crucial roles in the regulation and control of the three pillars of psychotherapy: attachment, empathy, and fear extinction (Welton & Kay, 2015).

Neurotransmitters, biochemicals, and other genetic variations are constantly explored in order to put light on the mystery of the biological effectiveness of psychotherapy. Nonetheless, management of mental illnesses or problems is done on a case-by-case basis. Psychiatrists should also take into consideration the patients' preferences, and most importantly, their safety.

### **References**

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