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Process oriented relaxation therapy for anxiety, does the diagnosis matter?

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Background. The process oriented approach to relaxation therapy aims to identify subjects with complicating background factors that prohibit sufficient success of relaxation treatment. In the recent guideline of Dutch General Practitioners for management of anxiety (Standaard Angstklachten, 2012), complaints without a DSM-IV diagnosis were also included. Most patients with unexplained symptoms are anxious. The question is how important is the presence of a DSM-IV diagnosis for success of relaxation therapy.

Method. Patients with anxiety as their main complaint were selected from an existing database, containing subjects who were referred for breathing and relaxation therapy from 2006-2011. Outcome was assessed clinically, complicating factors present (yes=1, no=0), and change in complaints (strongly improved=1, lightly improved or unchanged=2, not applicable=3) and by way of two checklists, Nijmegen Questionnaire (NQ, abnormal value >19)) and the General Function Questionnaire (GFQ, abnormal value>27).

Results. They were 255 subjects, 205 did not have a DSM-IV diagnosis (148 women, 57 men) and 50 subjects (36 women, 14 men) did. Treatment took on average 6 sessions. Complicating factors appeared to be present in 47% of the patients. Multivariate analysis of baseline and treatment outcome variables showed that factors associated with complications were: not working fulltime, anxiety but no breathing complaints at baseline, persistence of complaints of anxiety, of signs of physical tension or sleeping problems and persistent elevated NQ after treatment.

Discussion. Multimodal relaxation therapy appears to be successful for half of patients with anxiety or anxiety disorder. When treatment process is carefully monitored, the initial DSM-IV diagnosis is not relevant. This confirms the approach by Dutch GP's.

Preferably an oral presentation, but a poster is also OK