

Cochrane Corner

Counselling in primary care is effective in the short term

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The first reports of counsellors working in primary care were published in the early seventies. Practice counsellors in Australia, New Zealand and the UK were among the first to describe their role within the primary care team.

Counsellors come from different professional backgrounds and use a variety of treatments on a wide range of clients. The methodological difficulties in assessing the effectiveness of counselling, such as defining the study

population, the types of interventions and outcome measures, and devising control conditions, means that there has been a dearth of controlled studies of the effectiveness and cost effectiveness of counselling in primary care.

Patients	Therapy	Benefit	Harms	Comments
Mild/moderate depression, emotional problems, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder	Counselling usually for about 50 minutes and lasting 6-12 sessions. Control group usually usual care by GP. Counsellor usually registered with British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy	Benefit in the short term but not the long term. Scores in the intervention group at 60th percentile and in the control group 50th percentile	None reported	Cochrane review ¹

References

1. Bower P, Rowland N, Mellor Clark J, Heywood P, Godfrey C, Hardy R. Effectiveness and cost effectiveness of counselling in primary care. The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2002, Issue 1.

Members of the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners can have access to the full reviews by contacting Cherylyn Pearson at the College in Wellington. For the access codes to the Cochrane library contact cpearson@rnzcgp.org.nz at the College.

'There are questions that are crucial to the development of general practice even though they are not related to the individual care of patients, nor might they help an individual general practice. These are the science questions. In this article I argue that although these questions are not common, they have characteristics that require understanding. The art of asking a good question is just as important in the science of general practice as it is in the art of general practice.'

Kljakovic M. NZFP 2003;30(6):389-390