Fluoxetine Offers No Benefit for Anorexia Patients

BY TIMOTHY F. KIRN
Sacramento Bureau

TORONTO — Fluoxetine failed to prevent relapse of anorexia nervosa in the largest controlled medication trial to date exploring the issue, Dr. B. Timothy Walsh reported at the annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association.

"Antidepressants don't offer patients with anorexia nervosa very much," said Dr. Walsh, director of the eating disorders research unit of the New York State Psychiatric Institute, New York City. "We can't say for sure that an antidepressant other than fluoxetine wouldn't have an effect, but it would surprise me."

The study represents yet another failure to find an efficacious medical treatment for anorexia. These failures imply that anorexia is unlike any other psychiatric condition, Dr. Walsh said.

"Interventions that are useful for other sorts of possibly related disorders don't work terribly well for anorexia nervosa," he said. The only evidence-based treatment for anorexia is cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), which helps, but "not a lot," he added.

The investigators, whose results were later published, compared fluoxetine with placebo in a clinical trial involving 93 patients who had completed intensive treatment and maintained a body mass index (BMI) of at least 19 kg/m² for at least 2 weeks. The patients, all female, were aged 16-45 years and were treated at two medical centers that had extensive experience treating the disorder.

Dr. Walsh said he also looked only at those with depression, and at those who purged or restricted food only, and treatment still made no difference in those particular patients. "However we cut it, we can find no evidence that fluoxetine prolongs time to relapse … and we've looked pretty hard,' DR. WALSH

Additional reporting was done by contributing writer Mary Ann Moon.

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