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Computerised cognitive behaviour therapy for depression and anxiety

Understanding NICE guidance –
information for people with depression and
anxiety, their families and carers, and the public

Ordering information

You can download the following documents from www.nice.org.uk/TA097

- This booklet.
- The full guidance on this appraisal.
- A short version for healthcare professionals – the quick reference guide.
- The assessment report – details of all the studies that were looked at.

For printed copies of the quick reference guide or information for the public, phone the NHS Response Line on 0870 1555 455 and quote:

- N0979 (quick reference guide)
- N0980 (information for the public).

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What is NICE guidance?

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is the independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention and treatment of ill health. One of NICE's roles is to produce guidance (recommendations) on the use of medicines, medical equipment, diagnostic tests and clinical and surgical procedures within the NHS.

To produce this guidance, NICE looks at how well the medicine, equipment or procedure works and also how well it works in relation to how much it costs. This process is called an appraisal. The appraisal process involves the manufacturer of the medicine or equipment for which guidance is being produced and the organisations that represent the healthcare professionals, patients and carers who will be affected by the guidance.

NICE was asked to look at the available evidence on the use of computerised cognitive behaviour therapy (CCBT) for depression and anxiety. NICE was asked to provide guidance that will help the NHS in England and Wales decide when computerised cognitive behaviour therapy should be used.

What are depression and anxiety?

Depression and anxiety are mental health disorders. Depression involves feelings of sadness, despair, loss of hope and lack of interest in life that deepen and persist over time and may not have any obvious cause. People with severe depression may be unable to eat or sleep, to take part in social activities or to concentrate. Some people with severe depression think about suicide. Depression and anxiety often occur together.

People with anxiety disorders experience feelings of fear and have certain physical symptoms such as rapid heartbeat, tightness in the chest, stomach pains or feeling sick. Although everyone has feelings of fear sometimes, for people with anxiety disorders it happens often enough or severely enough to prevent them carrying out their normal everyday activities. There are different kinds of anxiety disorder. For some people the anxiety is general, not related to specific events, and is an unpleasant feeling that is there all the time. Other people experience panic attacks or phobias. A phobia is a fear of a certain situation or thing, such as an intense fear of being in an open space or of spiders or snakes.

Anxiety and depression are currently managed by drug therapy or a range of 'psychotherapies' (a generic term to cover the predominant talk-based psychological therapies in their various forms) or both.

Cognitive behaviour therapy is a kind of psychotherapy that is based on the idea that what we think about ourselves and the world around us affects how we feel and our behaviour. By changing the way we think, we can change our behaviour and emotional reactions. Cognitive behaviour therapy involves sessions with a therapist but the methods are also used in self-help manuals, audio tapes and videos.

What is CCBT?

In computerised cognitive behaviour therapy – or CCBT for short – the cognitive behaviour therapy is delivered using a computer. The CCBT may be in addition to or instead of sessions with a therapist. There are several different CCBT programs available to treat anxiety and depression.

Before someone starts using CCBT it's recommended that they are assessed to make sure the treatment is suitable for them, and they need to be given support in using the program. CCBT is not suitable for an individual with more severe symptoms of anxiety or depression who needs more intensive treatment and support from healthcare professionals.

CCBT packages currently available include:

- Beating the Blues, COPE and Overcoming Depression for treating depression
- FearFighter for panic/phobia, and
- OCFighter (previously known as BTSteps) for obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

What has NICE recommended on CCBT?

During the appraisal, NICE's Appraisal Committee read and heard evidence from:

- good-quality studies of CCBT
- doctors with specialist knowledge of depression and anxiety and their treatment
- individuals with specialist knowledge of the issues affecting people with depression and anxiety
- organisations representing the views of people who will be affected by the guidance (because they have, or care for someone with, the condition or because they work in the NHS and are involved in providing care for people with the condition)
- the manufacturers of the CCBT packages.

The evidence is summarised in the full guidance and additional information about the studies can be found in the assessment report for this appraisal (see 'Further information' section for details).

NICE has made the following recommendations about the use of CCBT to treat depression and anxiety within the NHS in England and Wales. It recommends using:

- Beating the Blues for people with mild and moderate depression.
- FearFighter for people with panic and phobia.

There is not enough evidence to recommend COPE and Overcoming Depression for managing depression. But people can use them specifically as part of ongoing or new clinical trials.

OCFighter is not recommended for people with obsessive-compulsive disorder who are not already using it. People who are currently using OCFighter either:

- as part of their treatment, or
- as part of a clinical trial

should have the option to continue with the treatment until they, their GP and/or specialist think it is right to stop.

What should I do next?

If you or someone you care for has depression or anxiety, you should discuss this guidance with your GP.

Will NICE review its guidance?

Yes. The guidance will be considered for review in September 2008.

Further information

The NICE website (www.nice.org.uk) has further information about NICE and the full guidance on computerised cognitive behaviour therapy for depression and anxiety that has been issued to the NHS. The assessment report, which contains details of the studies that were looked at, is also available from the NICE website. A short version of the guidance (a 'quick reference guide') is available on the website and from the NHS Response Line (phone 0870 1555 455 and quote reference number N0979).

You can find more information about depression and anxiety on the NHS Direct website (www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk). You can also phone NHS Direct on 0845 46 47.

Notes



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