Cognitive–behaviour therapy for health anxiety in medical patients (CHAMP): a randomised controlled trial with outcomes to 5 years

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Declared competing interests of authors: Paul Salkovskis is Editor-in-Chief of Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy, the official journal of the British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy, but does not receive any money in connection with this work. Paul Salkovskis and Hilary Warwick developed cognitive–behaviour therapy for health anxiety but have no financial or other interests in its use. Helen Tyrer has written a book (Tyrer H. Tackling Health Anxiety: A CBT Handbook. London: RCPsych Press; 2013), and Peter Tyrer and Helen Tyrer have co-authored online teaching modules on the recognition and treatment of health anxiety for the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Peter Tyrer is Co-Editor of Personality and Mental Health, for which he receives an annual honorarium.
Plain English summary

The CHAMP RCT

Health Technology Assessment 2017; Vol. 21: No. 50
DOI: 10.3310/hta21500

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Many people worry excessively about their health and suffer greatly as a consequence. They are frequent attenders in primary care and in medical clinics and secondary care. This study tested whether or not a modified form of cognitive–behaviour therapy for health anxiety (CBT-HA) given by supervised and trained therapists, most of whom were initially naive, was more effective than standard care in patients attending five types of medical clinic in five hospitals in England. We followed up these patients for 5 years.

We found that CBT-HA at an average of six sessions was much more effective than standard care in improving health anxiety and also led to greater improvement in anxiety and depressive symptoms. This greater improvement was found over the whole 5-year period. Those attending cardiology clinics had the most benefit. Costs were similar in both groups, mainly because many who took part had other medical illnesses as well as health anxiety. Nurses as therapists were at least as good as psychologists and other health professionals in giving the treatment.

We recommend that further work is needed in research to identify and treat the growing problem of health anxiety in hospitals.
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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HTA programme as project number 15/141/02. The contractual start date was in October 2008. The draft report began editorial review in May 2016 and was accepted for publication in February 2017. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HTA editors and publisher have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors’ report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the draft document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health.

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