

Newest Advances In The Treatment Of PTSD

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is more common than you think. Those suffering from PTSD find it difficult to spend time with their families and loved ones, even with themselves. They are unable to go to work and function normally and in many cases, feel like they have no control of their own lives.

The good news is that there are various forms of therapy that could prove beneficial for PTSD victims. These treatments are mainly categorized into two groups: counselling and medication. In most cases, both types of therapy are combined to reach the best possible outcomes.

The symptoms of PTSD have been studied and documented since the days of the ancient Greeks, and gaining more attention during the World Wars. The name of this mental disorder first came into use in the 1970s during the days of the Vietnam War, which forced the American Psychiatric Association to officially recognize it in 1980.

Developing after exposure to traumatic events, its symptoms often last months after the event has taken place. It affects 6 - 10% of all individuals at one point or another in their lifetime. It is one of the most debilitating and most disabling mental disorders.

Symptoms include:

- Nightmares
- Avoidance behavior
- Intrusive memories, such as flashbacks
- Sensory impressions
- Insomnia
- Irritability
- Hypervigilance
- Emotional detachment

Recently there have been a number of new breakthroughs in the treatment of PTSD that are proving their merit and significant potential.

Psychological Interventions

Family Treatments

There are two types of family treatments; both focus on decreasing the symptoms of detachment. They take the individual on a step-by-step journey to teach how to engage in life with more vigor, more focus and more attention.

Subjects have also gained more focus and attention in their lives via these techniques:

1. Interpersonal Psychotherapy

The first type mainly focuses on how PTSD symptoms disrupt the family structure. This mainly targets focuses less on treating the actual PTSD and zooms in on couple and family therapies to repair family dynamics and decrease stress within the relationships. This type of social support brings about interventions that focus on couples and families.

This type of therapy focuses on the effects the trauma has had on one's relationships. This form of therapy is more effective with those who dislike prolonged exposure treatments where they are exposed to their trauma and related fear cues. This is a type of social support that brings about couples and family-oriented interventions to help individuals adapt and grow.

2. Behavioral Therapy

The second, which is referred to as the present-centered approach, focuses on the individual's PTSD and how, with the support of the partner and/or family, recovery can be facilitated. It's a great way to give hope to those suffering with PTSD so that they can focus less on their traumatic past with support from their loved ones, and concentrate more on the future.

Behavioral Treatments

These types of treatments entail a structured approach to increasing the individual's engagement in activities, during the therapy session and even afterwards as a sort of homework assignment. Behavioral treatments work best with those whose symptoms of avoidance and social isolation are prominent. It's used to turn unwanted habits into good ones by talking about and managing your problems by changing the way you behave and think. It's one of the best ways to treat anxiety disorders and modify attitudes. It's also a wonderful way to provide incentives for them to change for the better.

Virtual Reality Therapy

Facing your fears may be a concept as old as time, but with all the technological advances we're surrounded with, confronting the source of one's anxiety is taking on a modern twist via this alternative treatment for PTSD.

Even though researchers at the Georgia Institute of Technology and Emory University were pioneers at creating "Virtual Vietnam" for the treatment of veterans, nowadays, this type of technology has been developed to re-create a

360-degree completely digitalized ambience of gunfire noises, radio chatter, aircraft flyovers.

Veterans engage their senses in the sheltered boundaries of a therapy office while talking through their experiences and gaining fresh and new insights and perspectives.

Virtual reality therapy has also been adapted to those suffering from other types of PTSD, such as motor vehicle accidents, terrorist attacks, and World Trade Center survivors, more so than treatments based on imagery exposure.

This type of treatment is also suitable for those who worry about the stigma of mental health treatment, or who live in remote areas and whose access to specialized healthcare is limited by geography. It's also extremely suitable for those with money or physical constraints and prefers to receive their treatments via their computers.

Pharmacologic Treatments

Even though guidelines by the National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health have recently suggested that initial treatments for PTSD should be via psychotherapy, medications are often a helpful, sometimes necessary, to ease symptoms and work collaboratively with psychotherapy.

Therefore, the need for developing more effective medical treatments has been on the rise lately, since there are only two current FDA-approved antidepressant medications for treating PTSD and both come with problematic side effects. Instead, researchers have been looking into already-known drugs for new uses.

D-cycloserine

Also referred to as DCS, this is probably the most significant in yielding results while used in conjunction with prolonged exposure treatment. DCS is a broad-spectrum antibiotic used over the years to improve learning by helping activate certain brain receptors linked to learning and forming memories. It seems to be an effective form of treating phobias and panic disorders.

Propranolol

This non-selective beta-blocker is typically used in the treatment of hypertension. During and after traumatic events, the body releases an excessive amount of epinephrine, and it's believed that the administration of propranolol shortly after a trauma could prevent the release of the receptors, subsequently avoiding any chances of developing PTSD.

Conclusion

There are always treatments emerging and being tested via clinical trials with the hope of finding the most effective treatment for PTSD. Yet what seems to be showing the biggest signs of breakthrough are the treatments based on technology, whether it's Virtual Reality, teleconferencing, as well as all the possibilities that the Internet brings. These treatments all come with the hope of bringing about a promising form of treatment, even for those living in remote areas and those suffering from various forms of PTSD.