

Does Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy Work?

(In the interest of simplicity the words psychoanalytic psychotherapy (PP) and psychodynamic psychotherapy (PDP) in this article are used interchangeably.)

Recent research reported in the **Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)** recently demonstrated that PDP therapy is significantly more effective for complex mental disorders than short-term psychotherapy. The study of 1053 patients by Falk Leichsenring, D.Sc., of the University of Giessen and Sven Rabung, Ph.D. of the University Medical Centre in Hamburg found that patients with personality disorders, chronic or multiple disorders, or complex depressive and anxiety disorders were better off after a year's treatment than 96% of those in comparison groups.

Dr Leichsenring wrote: ***'Long-term PDP therapy showed significant, large and stable treatment effects, which even significantly increased between end of treatment and follow-up assessment.'*** ***Not only is it effective, 'it also seems to be cost effective.'***

There is much disagreement about what constitutes a 'personality disorder'. The D of H, the media and PP therapists use the word differently. In the context of this research it means patients who are unable to make satisfactory relationships with other people, particularly relationships which might be beneficial to them.

In an editorial accompanying this research in the JAMA Professor Richard Glass MD from the University of Chicago wrote: ***'there is evidence and abundant clinical experience indicating that despite the desire for brief, cost effective interventions, patients with complex mental disorders . . . are often unlikely to respond to short-term treatments.'*** He continues: 'it is ironic and disturbing' that use of (PP) psychotherapy is declining even as evidence for its efficacy is increasing. 'Is that what is really wanted for patients with disabling disorders that could respond to more intensive treatments?'

Our own experience in A.P.E.L. is that patients, after a period of therapy, are more likely to be involved in satisfying relationships with a partner or friends, more likely to feel reasonably content with their employment and to be getting on with colleagues at work and to be earning more. We have also noticed a significant reduction in psycho-somatic illness as the therapy progresses. Patients who have undergone a substantial period of PP therapy are less likely to make frequent visits to their GP with stress related illnesses. They are also less likely to be suffering with depression in the years after therapy and less likely to ask for further psychological treatment or medication.

It is the view of A.P.E.L. therapists that in due course further research will prove that longer-term treatment is actually cost effective in the long-run. For the time being the cost will have to continue to be carried by the patients as longer-term treatment is normally only available privately.