

SUMMARY

The effectiveness of anxiety treatment on alcohol-dependent patients with a comorbid phobic disorder: a randomised controlled trial - A. Schadé, L.A. Marquenie, A.J.L.M. van Balkom, M.W.J. Koeter, W. van den Brink, R. van Dyck -

BACKGROUND There is evidence that the post-treatment relapse rate for alcohol-dependent patients with a comorbid anxiety disorder is higher than for alcohol-dependent patients without this disorder.

AIM To discover whether the post-treatment relapse rate in alcohol-dependent patients who suffer from both alcohol-dependence and a comorbid anxiety disorder can be lowered by giving them additional treatment specifically for the comorbid anxiety disorder.

METHOD A 32-week randomised controlled trial among 96 abstinent patients with a primary diagnosis of alcohol dependence and a comorbid anxiety disorder involving agoraphobia or social phobia. The patients were randomly assigned either to an intensive psychosocial relapse-prevention programme only ($n = 49$) or to a combined programme in which the aforementioned programme was supplemented by an anxiety treatment programme comprising cognitive behavioural therapy and optional pharmacotherapy in the form of an SSRI ($n = 47$). The primary outcome measure was the percentage of patients who suffered an alcohol relapse during a 32-week period. The secondary outcome measures were: total abstinence, a reduction in the number of days of heavy drinking and a reduction in anxiety symptoms.

RESULTS Although the anxiety symptoms in the group receiving cognitive behavioural therapy diminished more than in the group not receiving this therapy, the alcohol relapse rates in the former group were not significantly lower than in the latter group.

CONCLUSION Anxiety treatment for alcohol-dependent patients with a comorbid anxiety disorder can alleviate anxiety symptoms but has no significant effect on the outcome of alcohol treatment programmes.

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KEY WORDS comorbidity, sobriety, detoxification, antidepressants, treatment