

(W34) A TRIAL OF COGNITIVE BEHAVIOR THERAPY AND SUPPORTIVE LISTENING FOR ADJUSTMENT TO MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

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Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a challenging illness that can have a profound impact on patients' lives. Not surprisingly, difficulties with psychosocial adjustment are frequently encountered. There is evidence that a range of thoughts and behaviors are associated with, and may explain, differences in adjustment difficulties. The saMS trial is an in-progress randomized controlled trial comparing cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) to supportive listening (SL) for aiding adjustment to early-stage MS. Around 100 patients from NHS MS services in London and Southampton (UK) will be randomly allocated to either CBT or SL. Eligibility criteria include a diagnosis of MS within the last 10 years and the ability to walk a short distance (Expanded Disability Status Scale [EDSS] score <6.5). Participants undergo eight sessions of manualized therapy delivered by general nurses trained in both therapies. Therapy is one-to-one and is delivered via a combination of face-to-face sessions and telephone sessions. In CBT, participants collaborate with the nurse-therapist to address cognitions and behaviors involved in adjustment and practice new coping skills and strategies through homework tasks. In SL, participants simply have the opportunity to talk freely, extensively, and confidentially about their experiences, thoughts, and feelings about MS and its effect on their lives. Participants are assessed by questionnaire pre- and post-therapy and at 6- and 12-month follow-ups. The main outcome measures are psychological distress and work and social adjustment. Psychological factors related to the adjustment process are also assessed, as well as the cost-effectiveness of the interventions. In-depth interviews are being conducted with a subsample of around 30 participants following completion of therapy in order to elicit their viewpoints and experiences so that the therapy process can be better understood and refined. These interviews are transcribed and analyzed qualitatively using a form of thematic analysis.

Supported by: MS Society (UK)

Disclosure: The researcher(s) have reported no relevant financial disclosures.