PROJECT INFORMATION

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Comparing Peer-Led Support Groups with Therapist-Led Support Groups for Treating Hoarding Disorder

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What was the research about?

People with hoarding disorder are unable to give or throw things away. They also often buy or collect items to excess. Clutter caused by hoarding can lead to unsafe living conditions and make it hard to function in daily life. Group cognitive behavioral therapy, or CBT, is one type of treatment for hoarding disorder. Patients meet in groups with others who have hoarding disorder and learn to change their patterns of thinking and behavior.

Some communities only have a few therapists trained in CBT. This lack of therapists can make it hard for people with hoarding disorder to get treatment. Peer-led group therapy is a type of treatment led by people who have or have had hoarding disorder and received training to help others. It gives people more opportunities to get treatment.

The research team wanted to see if peer-led group therapy worked as well as therapist-led CBT to treat hoarding disorder.

What were the results?

The study found that peer-led group therapy helped as many patients with hoarding disorder as therapist-led CBT did. One month after treatment ended, patients in both groups had fewer symptoms of hoarding disorder. They were also better able to do daily activities, such as preparing food or taking showers. Within one to two years after treatment, patients in both groups still had fewer symptoms of

hoarding disorder but they did not maintain the improvements in daily activities.

Who was in the study?

The study included 323 patients with hoarding disorder in San Francisco, California. Of these patients, 75 percent were female. Sixty percent of patients were white, 11 percent were Asian, 8 percent were African American, and 20 percent were other or more than one race; 9 percent were Hispanic. The average age was 59.

What did the research team do?

The research team assigned patients by chance to one of two groups. One group took part in CBT led by therapists using a hoarding disorder therapy workbook as a guide. This group had 16 two-hour group sessions over 20 weeks. Patients in this group learned about hoarding symptoms. They also learned how to set goals and how to change their behavior and thinking.

The other group took part in peer-led therapy. Patients in this group had 15 two-hour sessions over 20 weeks. The group leaders had current or past hoarding disorder and received training to help others with hoarding disorder. They used a workbook that had similar activities to those of the CBT group.

The research team surveyed each patient about his or her hoarding disorder symptoms and daily activities. The team collected this information at the beginning

of the study and within one month after the end of treatment. One to two years after treatment ended, the team followed up with patients in the study again.

What were the limits of the study?

About 30 percent of patients in the study didn't finish treatment. The results may have been different if everyone completed the treatment. The findings from the study may not apply to patients with hoarding disorder who don't want treatment or who are not aware of their hoarding disorder.

Future studies could look into improving both types of treatment and examine ways to encourage patients to complete the treatments.

How can people use the results?

It can be hard to find trained therapists to help with hoarding disorder. Peer-led group therapy was as effective as group CBT and may be a good option for making treatment available to more people.

To learn more about this project, visit pcori.org/MathewsDelucchi082.