The Link Between Depression and Insomnia

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Depression is a heterogeneous disorder which is associated with high levels of disability and reduced quality of life. Depression has become the leading cause of disability and one of ten leading disorders for global disease burden. There is a bidirectional relationship between insomnia and depression. Approximately 80% patients with depression have insomnia [1]. It was proposed that insomnia could be a predictor of depression instead of being just a comorbid symptom of depression. Insomnia sufferers are three times more likely to develop depression [2]. Patients with depression and insomnia have a higher risk of committing suicide [3]. Insomnia often precedes the onset of depression and is present throughout the developmental course of depression. Insomnia may result in cognitive and affective alterations, as well as impaired emotional regulation and stability, leading to decreased quality of life, social and interpersonal functioning in depressed patients [2].

The mechanisms that underlie the relationship between depression and insomnia are still not well understood. High level of arousal that occurs in both conditions was proposed as a possible mediating factor. The high arousal level in both conditions was shown in various previous neurobiological and sleep EEG studies [4]. The other possible mechanism suggested was altered emotionality which found commonly in both conditions. Previous study found heightened negative emotionality and diminished positive emotionality which could be the psychological mechanism that mediates the relationship between insomnia and depression [5]. Insomnia may lead to depression by altering emotional responses.

Therefore, treating insomnia is a key objective in the management of depression. Selection of the most suitable drug for patients with depression and insomnia should be based on clinical expertise instead of depending solely on recommendations made by clinical practice guidelines. Antidepressants with 5-hydroxytryptamine 2 (5-HT2) blocking properties alleviate insomnia and improve sleep architecture. Drugs that potently block the 5-HT2 and 5-HT3 receptors, resulting in a significant shortening of sleep-onset latency, reducing night-time awakening, as well as increasing total sleep time [6]. This leads to a marked improvement not only in sleep efficiency but also reduction of depression.

References


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