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TITLE PAGE

Title: Efficacy of hypnotherapy in one thousand patients with irritable bowel syndrome.

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Abbreviations: IBS irritable bowel syndrome

IBS-SSS IBS symptom severity score

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SIRS;

We read the article by Miller et al. with interest.¹ This is a valuable study reporting on 'real world' response rates to hypnotherapy as a treatment option in patients with refractory irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). Evidence from systematic reviews and meta-analyses suggests that hypnotherapy is an efficacious treatment for IBS,^{2,3} but data from real-life clinical practice are always welcome. The authors are therefore to be commended for conducting a large-scale service evaluation of one thousand patients within a specialist unit, which demonstrated that three quarters of patients had a clinically significant benefit with hypnotherapy. We do, however, have some points we would like to make about their study.

Firstly, rates of response to therapy were only presented for those patients with symptom scores available pre- and post-hypnotherapy. As those individuals who had no benefit from hypnotherapy are more likely to have been lost to follow-up we feel this may have led to an overestimation of its efficacy. It would therefore be important to know how many patients, in total, commenced hypnotherapy during the study period.

Secondly, the authors stated that it would be meaningless to report how many patients had failed conventional medications prior to commencement of hypnotherapy. However, these data would still be valuable in order for readers to better understand how refractory these patients were to medical therapies. In addition, concomitant medical therapies may have had a significant impact on response rates to hypnotherapy. For instance, did the dual combination of pharmacological therapy with hypnotherapy make up the vast majority of the 42% of patients with the greatest reduction in IBS symptom severity score (IBS-SSS)?⁴

Thirdly, 76% of patients reported a 50-point reduction in IBS-SSS and 42% of patients had a 150-point reduction, after 3 months. We would be interested to know whether

any of their patients were in remission at the end of treatment (with an IBS-SSS <75 points) and, given that efficacy was only measured at 3 months, whether treatment response was durable? Did the authors collect data concerning re-consultation rates with symptoms beyond this time frame?

Finally, it is important to point out that the study was conducted at a specialist unit, with hypnotherapists who possessed 5 years of experience. Data from a recent study by Lindfors et al. suggests that specialised research centres have higher treatment effectiveness than other hospitals, ⁵ so it may be difficult to reproduce these impressive results elsewhere.

Competing interests:

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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