Esketamine More Effective Than Quetiapine for Hard-to-Treat Depression

Esketamine nasal spray was more effective for managing treatment-resistant depression than extended-release quetiapine, a commonly used antipsychotic medication, according to findings from a randomized open-label trial. The 676 participants, aged 18 to 74 years, continued treatment with a selective-serotonin reuptake inhibitor or serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor alongside esketamine or quetiapine during the study.

About 27% of participants receiving esketamine and about 18% of those receiving quetiapine experienced remission of their depression symptoms after 8 weeks of treatment. Fewer people in the esketamine group experienced a recurrence of depression symptoms after 4 months compared with the quetiapine group.

Although adverse events were more common in the esketamine group, they tended to be milder and shorter-lived than those in the quetiapine group. In addition, more people who received quetiapine withdrew from the trial due to adverse effects.

The findings support the potential inclusion of esketamine nasal spray early in the sequence of antidepressant treatment, the author of a linked editorial wrote in the New England Journal of Medicine, noting that the medication “seems to help prevent depression from consolidating its grip.”

– Emily Harris

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Note: Source references are available through embedded hyperlinks in the article text online.