Poor Sleep May Predict Major Depression Risk

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SAVANNAH, GA. — Poor sleep quality might be a modifiable risk for depression; moreover, many biomarkers associated with depression also are associated with poor sleep.

Poor sleep quality before interferon-alpha treatment appeared to predict which subjects would develop depressive symptoms, Dr. Francis E. Lotrich of the University of Pittsburgh reported during a symposium on geriatric depression.

The findings, which might have broader implications for geriatric depression, come from ongoing National Institute of Mental Health–funded research into interferon-induced depression.

Interferon-alpha therapy can induce major depression in about 25% of people within a few months of starting treatment, he said. Researchers prospectively followed a cohort of nondepressed hepatitis C patients about to receive interferon-alpha. Subjects were drawn from several overlapping studies and cohorts, Dr. Lotrich said in an interview; so far, researchers have followed over 100 patients.

Pretreatment with selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) might help prevent depression in some, but is not universally effective. Initial data suggest that those having elevated symptoms of depression might be the subset of people who benefit from using an SSRI to prevent interferon-induced depression.

Preliminary findings suggest that genetic polymorphisms in the serotonin transporter—and possibly in interaction with other genetic polymorphisms in other serotonin genes—can help predict the risk of major depressive disorder (MDD) in younger adults.

In older adults (for this presentation, aged 50 years and older), genetic polymorphisms in growth factor genes (such as BDNF) might help predict who is more at risk for major depressive disorder, he said. In addition, among older adults, elevations in other inflammatory cytokines, such as interleukin-6, might help predict who is at greater risk for MDD.

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DR. LOTRICH

What emerged across all age groups is that poor sleep quality can predict who is at risk for MDD. Poor sleep quality before interferon-alpha treatment appeared to predict depression. Moreover, many of the genes and blood-based biomarkers that predict depression are associated with poor sleep as well. "Poor sleep explained everything," Dr. Lotrich said.

He cautions, however, that whether addressing poor sleep quality can prevent interferon-induced depression—or, for that matter, other types of depression—remains to be determined. "We can treat sleep," Dr. Lotrich said. "Can we treat depression by treating sleep?" ■

Disclosures: *Dr. Lotrich's research has been funded by the NIMH.*

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Genes and biomarkers that predict depression also are tied to poor sleep.