

Mind, Body and Heart: Psychotherapy and the Relationship between Mental and Physical Health

MATTHEW BAMBLING

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Abstract

A mounting body of research confirms the clinical wisdom that mental health affects physical health. Recent psychophysiological research has unraveled some of the mechanisms by which mental health problems and general life stress may cause physical diseases such as coronary heart disease, cancer, diabetes and autoimmune disorders. Encouraging news for the mental health practitioner is that the sum of research findings suggests that psychological treatment not only improves psychological symptoms, but can have an independent effect on physical health and disease. The mind-body connection appears so significant that the use of psychological techniques can even reduce the risk of most major diseases. Matthew Bambling draws on recent research and behavioural medicine to illustrate how depression and anxiety influence physiological processes with particular reference to coronary heart disease. An evaluation is undertaken of how psychotherapy and psychological interventions can influence not only mental health, but also physical health through reduction of the stress response and associated endocrine function. The implications of these findings for clinical practice are explored.

Keywords

psychotherapy; counseling; counselling; mental health; health; clinical practice

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