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LONG-TERM EFFECTIVENESS OF COMBINED ALPRAZOLAM AND COGNITIVE-BEHAVIORAL THERAPIES IN PANIC DISORDER

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Benzodiazepines, particularly alprazolam, have been shown to be effective in the treatment of panic disorder. However, difficult withdrawal and high relapse rates after successful discontinuation continue to be problems with this class of medication. Recent studies instituting cognitive-behavioral therapy as a treatment supplement to alprazolam taper have shown promising results at short-term follow-up. The present study investigated whether these procedures produce long-term (two- to four-year) improvement. Patients were stabilized on alprazolam and randomly assigned to either an alprazolam-only group or the same condition with twelve weeks of concurrent cognitive-behavioral therapy. Twenty patients who completed these treatments were assessed at two- to four-year follow-up. In addition to the discontinuation success rates, self-report and clinician-rated measures concerning panic attack frequency, disability intensity, agoraphobic avoidance, and anxiety severity were used to evaluate relapse. Preliminary analysis of clinician-rated assessments suggests that patients receiving combined therapy were clinically improved at long-term follow-up in comparable percentages to previously published data. Results and clinical implications for combined alprazolam and cognitive-behavioral therapy will be discussed at the conference.