



Psychotherapy's Role in the Management of Medically Unexplained Physical Symptoms

Michal Hytych*

Department of Psychology, Masaryk University, Brno, Czechia

DESCRIPTION

Medically Unexplained Physical Symptoms (MUPS) are symptoms that cause significant distress or impairment in functioning, but do not have a clear medical explanation. MUPS are very common and can affect any part of the body or system. Some examples of MUPS are chronic fatigue syndrome, irritable bowel syndrome, fibromyalgia, functional neurological disorder, and somatic symptom disorder. MUPS can have a negative impact on the quality of life, well-being, and productivity of the affected individuals. They can also lead to high healthcare costs and unnecessary or harmful investigations and treatments. Therefore, it is important to recognize and manage MUPS effectively. The causes of MUPS are not fully understood, but they are likely to involve a complex interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors.

Some possible factors that may contribute to MUPS are- Genetic predisposition; Early life trauma or stress; Personality traits such as perfectionism or neuroticism; Cognitive biases such as catastrophizing or selective attention; Emotional regulation difficulties such as alexithymia or suppression; Maladaptive coping strategies such as avoidance or over activity; Negative illness beliefs or expectations; Unhelpful doctor-patient communication or relationship; Sociocultural influences such as stigma or media. The treatment of MUPS should be tailored to the individual needs and preferences of the patient, and should address both the symptoms and the underlying factors. The most effective current treatment for some MUPS is a combination of therapeutic approaches under medical supervision.

Some of the common components of treatment

Psycho-education: This involves providing accurate and reassuring information about the nature and causes of MUPS, and correcting any misconceptions or fears. Psycho-education can help to reduce anxiety, increase self-efficacy, and enhance motivation for change.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): This is a form of psychotherapy that aims to identify and modify unhelpful

thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that may maintain or worsen MUPS. CBT can help to improve symptom perception, coping skills, mood, and functioning.

Antidepressants: These are medications that can help to regulate mood and pain perception. Antidepressants may also have anti-inflammatory and neuroprotective effects that may benefit some patients with MUPS. However, the evidence for their effectiveness is not yet conclusive, and they should be used with caution and monitoring.

Relaxation therapy: This involves teaching techniques such as progressive muscle relaxation, breathing exercises, mindfulness, or guided imagery that can help to reduce stress, muscle tension, and pain. Relaxation therapy can also enhance well-being and sleep quality.

Physiotherapy: This involves providing exercises and advice on physical activity, posture, ergonomics, and pain management. Physiotherapy can help to improve physical fitness, mobility, strength, and endurance. It can also prevent deconditioning, disability, and complications.

Other therapies: Depending on the type and severity of MUPS, other therapies such as hypnotherapy, acupuncture, biofeedback, or dietary interventions may also be helpful for some patients. However, these therapies should be used with caution and evidence-based guidance.

The treatment of MUPS requires a collaborative and supportive approach between the patient and the healthcare professionals. The goals of treatment should be realistic and achievable, and should focus on improving functioning rather than curing symptoms. The patient should be encouraged to take an active role in their recovery process, and to monitor their progress and outcomes. The treatment should also be regularly reviewed and adjusted according to the patient's response and feedback. MUPS are challenging but treatable conditions that affect many people across the world. With appropriate assessment and management, patients with MUPS can achieve significant improvement in their symptoms and quality of life.

Correspondence to: Michal Hytych, Department of Psychology, Masaryk University, Brno, Czechia, E-mail: michytych@biomed.edu.cz

Received: 03-Apr-2023, Manuscript No. JOP-23-21155; **Editor assigned:** 06-Apr-2023, PreQC No. JOP-23-21155(PQ); **Reviewed:** 20-Apr-2023, QC No JOP-23-21155; **Revised:** 27-Apr-2023, Manuscript No. JOP-23-21155 (R); **Published:** 04-May-2023. DOI: 10.35248/2378-5756.23.26.587

Citation: Hytych M (2023) Psychotherapy's Role in the Management of Medically Unexplained Physical Symptoms. J Psychiatry. 26:587.

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