Randomised controlled trial of brief intervention with biofeedback and hypnotherapy in patients with refractory irritable bowel syndrome

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ABSTRACT Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a common disorder associated with profoundly impaired quality of life and emotional distress. The management of refractory IBS symptoms remains challenging and non-pharmacological therapeutic approaches have been shown to be effective. We compared brief interventions with biofeedback and hypnotherapy in women referred by their GP with refractory IBS symptoms. Patients were randomised to one of two treatment groups, biofeedback or hypnotherapy, delivered as three one-hour sessions over 12 weeks. Symptom assessments were undertaken using validated, self-administered questionnaires. Two of the 128 consecutive IBS patients suitable for the study declined to consider non-pharmacological therapy and 29 patients did not attend beyond the first session. Of the 97 patients randomised into the study, 21 failed to attend the therapy session; 15 of 76 patients who attended for therapy dropped out before week 12 post-therapy. The mean (SD) change in IBS symptom severity score 12 weeks post-treatment in the biofeedback group (0) was −116.8 (99.3) and in the hypnotherapy group −58.0 (101.1), a statistically significant difference between groups (difference= −58.8, 95% confidence interval [CI] for difference [−111.6, −6.1], p=0.029). In 61 patients with refractory IBS, biofeedback and hypnotherapy were equally effective at improving IBS symptom severity scores, total non-gastrointestinal symptom scores and anxiety and depression ratings during 24 weeks follow-up. Biofeedback may prove to be the more cost-effective option as it requires less expertise.

KEYWORDS Irritable bowel syndrome, hypnotherapy, biofeedback

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**FIGURE 2A** Irritable bowel syndrome symptom severity scores (IBS-SS).

**FIGURE 4A** Total non-gastrointestinal symptom (other symptoms) scores.
FIGURE 5A Total hospital and anxiety depression scores (HADS).

FIGURE 6 Irritable bowel syndrome symptom severity score (IBS-SS) vs hospital anxiety and depression score (HADS).