



HEAD SCAN MAY TELL WHETHER DEPRESSION DRUGS WILL WORK

June 10, 2002 -- WASHINGTON - A simple one-hour brain scan may be able to predict who will be helped by antidepressants and who will not, scientists said.

Weeks before patients showed any visible benefits from taking antidepressants, their brain waves start changing, the researchers said.

The method can save patients from wasting time taking drugs that are both expensive and have potential side effects, said the researchers, led by Dr. Ian Cook at the University of California at Los Angeles.

Cook said his team's method, electroencephalograms or EEGs, which measure brain activity, shows changes soon after patients took medications. Cook's team reported their findings in the journal *Neuropsychopharmacology*.

His team studied 51 volunteers, divided into groups that got either Prozac, Effexor, or a placebo.

Overall, 52 percent of the volunteers, who had acute depression, responded to one of the two drugs, while 38 percent responded to the placebo, they reported. The rest did not show significant improvement.

But there was a clear pattern early on in the EEGs of those who later showed clinical responses - meaning they felt measurably better.

"This is the first study to detect specific changes in brain-wave activity that precede the clinical changes in a way that can usefully predict response," Cook said.

Reuters

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