

# Therapeutic Approaches to Managing Depressive Disorder in Primary Care

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## ABOUT THE STUDY

In primary care settings, the management of depressive disorder presents a multifaceted challenge. With depression being one of the most prevalent mental health disorders globally, primary care physicians often find themselves at the forefront of diagnosing, treating, and supporting individuals grappling with its debilitating effects. Fortunately, a variety of therapeutic approaches exist that can be effectively implemented within the primary care setting to address depressive symptoms and promote overall well-being.

### Understanding depressive disorder in primary care

Understanding the complexity of depressive illness is essential before implementing any therapeutic measures. Depression extends beyond mere feelings of sadness; it encompasses a range of symptoms including persistent low mood, loss of interest or pleasure in activities, changes in appetite or weight, sleep disturbances, fatigue, feelings of worthlessness or guilt, difficulty concentrating, and recurrent thoughts of death or suicide. In primary care, the challenge lies in identifying these symptoms amidst the myriad of physical complaints patients may present with.

### Integrating therapeutic approaches in primary care

**Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** It is a crucial in the treatment of depressive disorder due to its structured, goal-oriented approach. Primary care physicians can collaborate with psychologists or therapists trained in CBT to provide brief, targeted interventions. CBT focuses on identifying and challenging negative thought patterns, modifying behaviors that contribute to depression, and developing coping strategies to manage symptoms effectively.

**Brief psychodynamic therapy:** In primary care settings, time constraints often necessitate the use of brief interventions. Brief psychodynamic therapy, although traditionally longer-term, can be adapted to suit the primary care context.

**Interpersonal Therapy (IPT):** It revolves around improving interpersonal relationships and communication patterns, recognizing the significant role social support plays in managing depressive disorder. Primary care physicians can facilitate IPT by addressing conflicts, improving communication skills, and enhancing social support networks, thereby alleviating depressive symptoms.

**Medication management:** While primary care physicians may not specialize in psychiatry, they are often the first point of contact for individuals seeking help for depressive symptoms. Collaborating with psychiatrists or mental health specialists, primary care physicians can initiate and monitor antidepressant medications, tailoring treatment regimens to individual patient needs while ensuring close monitoring for efficacy and side effects.

**Lifestyle modifications:** Lifestyle factors such as exercise, diet, sleep, and stress management significantly influence depressive symptoms. In primary care, physicians can empower patients to make positive lifestyle changes by providing guidance on exercise routines, nutritional strategies, sleep hygiene practices, and stress reduction techniques.

### Challenges and considerations

While therapeutic approaches to managing depressive disorder in primary care offer promise, several challenges must be acknowledged. Time constraints, limited resources, stigma surrounding mental health, and patient adherence to treatment plans are significant barriers primary care physicians face. Moreover, the diversity of depression symptoms calls for a customised approach to treatment, emphasising the significance of careful evaluation and continuous observation.

Primary care physicians play a vital role in the management of depressive disorder, employing a range of therapeutic approaches to alleviate symptoms and improve overall quality of life for patients. By integrating evidence-based interventions such as cognitive behavioral therapy, brief psychodynamic therapy, interpersonal therapy, medication management, and lifestyle

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**Received:** 23-Feb-2024, Manuscript No. FMMSR-24-30241; **Editor assigned:** 26-Feb-2024, PreQC No. FMMSR-24-30241 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 12-Mar-2024, QC No. FMMSR-24-30241; **Revised:** 19-Mar-2024, Manuscript No. FMMSR-24-30241 (R); **Published:** 26-Mar-2024, DOI: 10.37532/2327-4972.24.13.179

**Citation:** Anuar N (2024) Therapeutic Approaches to Managing Depressive Disorder in Primary Care. J Fam Med Med Sci Res. 13: 179.

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modifications, primary care settings can serve as a crucial avenue for addressing the complex needs of individuals struggling with depression. Collaboration with mental health specialists,

continuous learning, and a patient-centered approach are essential in navigating the multifaceted landscape of depressive disorder management in primary care.