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Treating insomnia in alcohol-dependent patients

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Abstract

Insomnia is common, persistent and associated with relapse and suicidality in alcohol-dependent patients. In up to half of cases, insomnia may precede the development of alcohol dependence; and childhood sleep problems predict early-onset drinking in boys. This talk will first review normal sleep and its measurement, followed by what is known regarding the prevalence, correlates, and persistence of insomnia in alcohol-dependent patients. Underlying disturbances in sleep regulatory mechanisms (sleep drive homeostasis and circadian rhythm physiology) and genetic influences are covered. Due to its multifactorial etiology including substance-related and other underlying factors, clinical assessment of insomnia is crucial before selecting among the best treatment options. These options include behavioral therapy alone or in combination with pharmacotherapy, while traditional sleeping medication with abuse potential can be avoided in the overwhelming majority of cases. Studies that address whether treating insomnia prevents relapse to drinking are presented. Specific practice points will be emphasized.

Biography

Kirk J. Brower is Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Michigan, where he joined the faculty in 1986. He graduated medical school with honors from the University of California, Irvine and completed a psychiatry residency at UCLA. He directs the University of Michigan Addiction Treatment Services as well as their accredited Addiction Psychiatry Fellowship Program. He is a Fellow of the American Society of Addiction Medicine. His research focuses on improving treatment for alcohol dependence and co-occurring insomnia. He has authored over 100 peer-reviewed journal articles, and serves on the Board of Field Editors for *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*.

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