Some Depression Scales Worth Considering

Hamilton Depression Rating Scale

The Hamilton Depression Rating Scale (HAM-D) is a 21-question multiple choice questionnaire which doctors may use to rate the severity of a patient's depression. It was originally published in 1960 by Max Hamilton, and is presently one of the most commonly used scales for rating depression in medical research. The questionnaire rates the severity of symptoms observed in depression such as low mood, insomnia, agitation, anxiety and weight-loss.

The doctor must choose the possible responses to each question by interviewing the patient and observing their symptoms. Each question has between 3-5 possible responses which increase in severity. The first 17 questions contribute to the total score and questions 18-21 are recorded to give further information about the depression such as if paranoid symptoms are present.


Beck Depression Inventory

The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI, BDI-II), created by Dr. Aaron T. Beck, is a 21-question multiple-choice self-report inventory that is one of the most widely used instruments for measuring the severity of depression. The most current version of the questionnaire is designed for individuals aged 13 and over and is composed of items relating to depression symptoms such as hopelessness and irritability, cognitions such as guilt or feelings of being punished, as well as physical symptoms such as fatigue, weight loss, and lack of interest in sex. There are three versions of the BDI—the original BDI, first published in 1961 and later revised in 1971 as the BDI-1A, and the BDI-II, published in 1996. The BDI is widely used as an assessment tool by healthcare professionals and researchers in a variety of settings.


Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale

The Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale was designed by Duke University psychiatrist, Dr. William W.K. Zung to assess the level of depression for patients diagnosed with depressive disorder.

The Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale is a short self-administered survey to quantify the depressed status of a patient. There are 20 items on the scale that rate the four common characteristics of depression: the pervasive effect, the physiological equivalents, other disturbances, and psychomotor activities.
There are ten positively worded and ten negatively worded questions. Each question is scored on a scale of 1-4 (a little of the time, some of the time, good part of the time, most of the time).

The scores range from 25-100.

25-49 Normal Range

50-59 Mildly Depressed

60-69 Moderately Depressed

70 and above Severely Depressed

Zung, WWK (1965) A self-rating depression scale. Arch Gen Psychiatry 12, 63-70.

Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scales (CES-D)

N.B. In addition to the psychometrically rigorous instruments above, there is an additional instrument listed in the Treatment Improvement Protocol 48. It is not an empirically tested screening instrument like the other three. The 20 questions in it are very similar to those found in the other three, but rather than being used for a screening/diagnostic instrument, it is intended to be used for clinical monitoring. The suggestion is to administer the instrument at the beginning of treatment and then periodically throughout the course of treatment. In this way, changes in mood may be caught more quickly. The CES-D seems to be very robust and has good test-retest strength.

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