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## **Placebos do work on the depressed**

WASHINGTON - Brain scans show that patients with depression have clear physical responses to both drugs and sugar pills, but the responses are dramatically different.

The study might show ways for doctors to use the placebo response - when patients get better from a sham treatment or drug - to improve standard treatments, said Dr Andrew Leuchter, the psychiatrist at the University of California, Los Angeles, who led the study.

'What this study shows, for the first time, is that people who get better on placebos have a change in brain function, just as surely as people who get better on medication,' he said.

The study also suggests that treating depression has two important parts - the medications and the very act of seeking treatment, he said.

His team gave 51 patients either an antidepressant or a placebo, and used quantitative electroencephalography (Qeeg) imaging to see what went on in their brains.

Overall, 52 per cent of the subjects - 13 out of 25 - receiving antidepressant medication responded to treatment, while 38 per cent - 10 out of 26 - of those receiving placebos responded.

Dr Leuchter said in the immediate outcome, they were virtually indistinguishable. But once people realised they were not taking real drugs, the placebo effect stopped.

He said: 'If we can identify what some of the mechanisms are that help people get better with placebos, we may be able to make treatments more effective.'

In depression, deciding to get treatment - whether drugs, herbs, or any other treatment on the market - may be half the battle, he said.

--Reuters

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