



The Placebo Effect in Clinical Practice

Walter A. Brown

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The role that the placebo effect plays in many treatments is clear: it not only plays a complimentary role in most treatments but it can sometimes be the only benefit of treatment. Brain imaging studies over the past decade have shown that placebo-treated patients undergo some of the same changes in brain activity as those treated with pharmacologically active substances. Yet this important component of healing is not yet harnessed in clinical settings.

The Placebo Effect in Clinical Practice brings together what we know about the mechanisms behind the placebo response, as well as the procedures that promote these responses, in order to provide a focused, and concise, overview on how current knowledge can be applied in treatment settings.

An introductory chapter documents the ubiquity and extent of the placebo response and discusses the history of the placebo response in relation to medical treatment. Several subsequent chapters focus on how placebos work and how the placebo effect can be enhanced. Expectation, conditioning and elements of the treatment situation are covered in separate chapters. The relationship between psychotherapy and placebo treatment is covered as is the ethics of deliberate use of the placebo effect. Because placebo effects are particularly prominent in some psychiatric conditions, particular attention is given to the role of the placebo response in psychiatric treatment. The final chapter summarizes what we currently know and offers concrete suggestions for how what we know of the placebo effect can be used to enhance the benefit of all treatments.

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