Author’s response to reviews

Title: The potential role of Illness Expectations in the progression of medical diseases

Authors:

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Author’s response to reviews:

AU: Again, I’d like to thank the reviewers and the editor for the constructive and clarifying comments, which greatly helped me to improve the manuscript.

First, the idea that the placebo response depends upon deception is not strictly true. While placebo paradigms in healthy controls commonly employ deception (i.e., subjects are told that they are receiving an analgesic when they are not), in patients they most commonly employ ambiguity (i.e., subjects are told that it is uncertain what treatment they are receiving). They active ingredient in placebo response is more accurately characterized as the degree of belief that whatever the intervention is, it is likely to be of benefit. This is not illness expectation as defined by the authors, but treatment expectations. Such expectations are dependent upon the relationship with the provider, novelty of the offered treatment, experiences with similar treatments, as well as attitudes towards the illness. The subtleties and complexities of this area are simply ignored by the authors.

AU: That is correct, thank you. I have now changed the text with a wider idea of the placebo response, and referring more to ambiguity than deception.

Second, there is a large literature on beliefs and treatment outcome that is not mentioned by the authors. Those individuals who are more religious and/or more optimistic are reported to have better health outcomes from treatment as well as greater longevity. At the very least, this literature should be discussed by the authors for how it wold fit into their theory.

AU: Thanks. Part of these findings are now more explicitly mentioned and their possible role in the theory is now discussed.

Reviewer reports:

Ulrike Bingel(Reviewer #2):
The authors have addressed all my points, although in a rather superficial manner. As the authors do not empirically support the idea that expectation actually changes the "progression" of diseases I would change the title accordingly, maybe "the possible role of expectation on medical disease".
AU: Thanks for the note, I agree with the point. Actually, the title had already been changed in “The potential role of Illness Expectations in the progression of medical diseases”, adding the adjective “potential”. I think that makes clear the current theoretical nature of the idea. However, I am open to further revise the title if that does not seem clear.

The authors could at least mention scales such as the treatment expectancy and credibility scale and other preliminary attempts to assess treatment expectation.

AU: There is now a section about some currently existed assessment strategies.

Otherwise I still think the authors propose an interesting model that should be backed up by experimental and clinical data in future research.

AU: Thanks for the insightful comments and your helpful review!