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Introduction to the issue

## Introduction to Kirsch, Moore, Scoboria, & Nicholls (2002) and Expert Commentaries

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In this issue of *Prevention & Treatment*, [Kirsch, Moore, Scoboria, & Nicholls \(2002\)](#) present an introductory piece and a meta-analysis of efficacy data submitted to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for approval of the six most widely prescribed antidepressants approved between 1987 and 1999. They report that, although the difference in drug versus placebo response was statistically significant, approximately 80% of the medication response was duplicated in the placebo control. The accompanying expert commentaries reflect the broad range of reactions that such findings provoke.

Several commentators agree that the [Kirsch et al. \(2002\)](#) findings are not unique but, rather, are consistent with those of other published reports. The commentators differ markedly, however, in the explanations they advance for the findings. They variously suggest that the Kirsch et al. findings (a) reveal the lack of efficacy of antidepressant medications over and above their placebo value, (b) are at least in part epiphenomena of procedural attributes of the trials reviewed or other aspects of the meta-analysis, or (c) are an underrepresentation of drug effects for many depressed individuals receiving specific medications under particular conditions. Commentators also differ in the clinical significance they assign to the unique effects attributable to antidepressant medications, as well as in the implications they pose.

Certainly, the [Kirsch et al. \(2002\)](#) findings and thoughtful commentaries converge in pointing to the pressing need for intensive examination of biological and psychosocial mechanisms responsible for intervention and placebo effects (e.g., [Leuchter, Cook, Witte, Morgan, & Abrams, 2002](#)) and specification of sources of heterogeneity in treatment

response. Such research, which enables the identification of predictors of response to specific therapeutic interventions (e.g., [Cook et al., 2002](#); [Hardy et al., 2001](#)), will allow the development of more efficient and effective treatments for depression. We hope that the findings and commentaries presented in this issue catalyze continued discussion and investigation aimed at enhancing interventions for individuals who experience this debilitating disorder.

## References

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