Mechanisms and Effects of Oxytocin on Social Cognition in Schizophrenia

Researchers at the San Francisco VA Medical Center (SFVAMC) are investigating the effect of the hormone oxytocin on our social thoughts and behaviors. Oxytocin, often referred to as the “love and bonding” hormone, is produced naturally in the body. In studies that gave the hormone to humans, it was found to be safe, shown to increase social skills such as understanding emotions, and no significant side effects were reported.

Schizophrenia is a neurodevelopmental disorder that often begins in adolescence and often interferes with normal social developments as youth transition into early adulthood and beyond. People with schizophrenia can have difficulties with social relationships, which can impact interactions with others.

Available treatment options for schizophrenia do not generally improve social skills and have significant side effects. This study, led by Dr. Joshua Woolley, investigates how oxytocin impacts the social skills of people diagnosed with schizophrenia.

Study design

To determine eligibility, the study team will briefly interview you in person or by phone. You will be asked questions about your health history. If you meet the study requirements and consent to participate, you will be asked to:

- Attend two or three study visits at the San Francisco Veterans Affairs Medical Center (4150 Clement Street).
- Inhale a nasal spray containing oxytocin or a placebo. The placebo will contain a saline solution.
- Complete questionnaires about your thoughts, feelings, and habits, and perform some tasks on the computer. You may also have the opportunity to get a brain scan.

Participant requirements

We invite volunteers with AND without schizophrenia to participate in the study. Results of the two groups will be compared.

Criteria for volunteers with diagnosed schizophrenia:

- Between the ages of 18-70 and in general good health
- Able to read and speak English
- No illegal substance abuse in the past 3 months
Criteria for volunteers without schizophrenia:

- Between the ages of 18-70 and in general good health
- Able to read and speak English
- No illegal substance abuse in the past 3 months
- Do not meet the criteria for a current psychiatric disorder according to the DSM-IV

Compensation

Eligible participants may receive $45+ per session (up to $135 total) for taking part in the study.

Principal investigator

Joshua Woolley, MD, PhD

Contact information

You may contact the study coordinator and other study research assistants by sending an email to TheBANDLab@gmail.com or by calling (415) 504-2263.

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[2] mailto:TheBANDLab@gmail.com