

Teaser

Medical journalist David Tuller, frequent contributor to the New York Times, has published a [series of articles](#) outlining the serious concerns with the conduct, analyses, and results of the U.K.'s £5 million PACE trial of chronic fatigue syndrome. Based on the strength of this analysis, [six researchers](#), four from outside the field, have written a letter to *The Lancet* calling for an independent re-analysis of the data. Other researchers and the patient community have also called for an independent review of PACE and for the removal of CBT and GET from clinical guidelines.

The full article

Journalist David Tuller, DrPH, has published an investigative report outlining serious concerns with the conduct, analyses, and results of the U.K.'s £5 million PACE trial of chronic fatigue syndrome, which claimed that 22 percent of patients recovered after cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and graded exercise therapy (GET). The theory behind PACE is that the debility of ME/CFS is caused by deconditioning which in turn is the result of patients' "fear of activity" and "unhelpful beliefs" about having an organic disease. CBT and GET are said to reverse the deconditioning and false cognitions.

Echoing the analyses done by patients over the years, Dr. Tuller identified a number of problems with the PACE trial, including the following:

1. PACE used the Oxford definition, which requires *only* six months of fatigue. NIH's 2015 Pathways to Prevention report on ME/CFS recommended retiring Oxford because it is overly broad and includes patients who do not have ME/CFS.
2. Entry criteria, recovery criteria, and data analysis methods were all changed after the trial began. This is especially problematic as the trial was unblinded, and no analysis of the effect of these changes has been published.
3. The change in recovery criteria meant that patients could worsen from their entry scores and still be counted as "recovered" on two key outcome measures. Thirteen percent of PACE subjects met one of these modified recovery criteria when they entered the trial.
4. None of the objective measures set forth in the study protocol supported trial claims of successful treatment and recovery.
5. During the trial, a newsletter was posted on the trial website that included positive testimonials from other patients, and government endorsement of the therapies under investigation. This could create a risk of participant bias.
6. PACE trial participants did not receive disclosure of the financial conflicts of interest of some of the study investigators, despite those investigators having previously agreed to disclose the conflicts.

Since the publication of Tuller's articles, other researchers, journalists and the patient community have voiced their own concerns with the trial. [Six researchers](#) called on *The Lancet* to "seek an independent re-analysis of the individual-level PACE trial data" as did [InvestInME](#). *The Lancet* has not yet responded. [A patient petition](#) has collected over 11,000 signatures calling for the retraction of PACE claims of recovery and for the release of recovery data. A patient advocate and a researcher have filed separate requests to access the trial data the data has not yet been released.

PACE is hugely influential in how patients are treated in the media, by society, and especially in medical practice. Globally, ME/CFS evidence reviews and clinical guidelines, including those of the CDC and those updated since the Institute of Medicine report, recommend CBT and GET based in part on the PACE trial. This has reinforced medical disbelief and misperception about the nature of the disease and resulted in harmful treatment recommendations. To counter this impact, [U.S. patient organizations](#) and [patients across countries](#) have called for HHS to investigate Tuller's

concerns and to remove recommendations for CBT and GET from both HHS's medical education and the 2014 AHRQ (part of HHS) Evidence Review.

For more information on Dr. Tuller's analysis, see his articles [here](#). Julie Rehmeyer has also published an excellent overview of the Tuller's articles and subsequent actions in [Slate Magazine](#).