



The science of the mind: investigating mental health

Treating the individual: psychologist perspective

Narrator

As a chartered clinical psychologist, Professor Neil Frude is very familiar with the wide range of treatments available to people diagnosed with mental health conditions.

Professor Neil Frude

I think one thing that people don't recognise maybe is that the majority of people with a mental health problem would actually be treated in primary care by their general practitioner, and until recently at least this has really meant that the treatment on offer has had to be pharmacological.

So the treatment available in primary care has traditionally, of course, been medication, it's been anti-depressant medication or anti-anxiety medication, tranquilisers, and these are in many cases very effective, but a lot of people actually don't like taking tablets for what they see as very often a problem of, you know, lifestyle, relationships, and so on. Somehow they can't see how the treatment for having a really bad relationship that's getting them down, or having had a bereavement that's really affected them very badly, how the answer to that can be, you know, a blue pill, or a green pill or a white pill, and so what they would prefer is to actually have some form of what we call 'talking therapy', psychological therapy or counselling, and increasingly there are counsellors attached to primary care practices, and it might be in some cases that cognitive behaviour therapy is available in various forms, and indeed a major advance over the last five years has been the introduction of something called IAPT in England, which is the Increased Access to Psychological Therapies programme, which has meant really that a lot more people now are able to benefit from the psychological treatments which we know are very effective. On the whole the psychological treatments for depression and anxiety are at least as effective as the treatments that you get in bottles. Both are effective and sometimes for different people, and overall the majority of people prefer psychological treatment to the pharmacological treatment.

Cognitive behaviour therapy has been shown again and again to be really effective, and one of the particularly interesting things is that it's useful and effective in all sorts of forms of delivery, not only by one to one therapist to client treatment, which is the one we always think about, any form of psychotherapy I guess, as being that one to one relationship, but also in group settings it can be useful. And it can also be delivered by computer, either a desk top computer or over the internet, and there are some very powerful and freely available CBT based internet websites.

Another approach, in Wales for example, is that there is a national book prescription scheme and I was involved in the start of this. What happened is that we surveyed clinical psychologists and counsellors and said that, you know, there's some very good books, self help books based mostly on cognitive behaviour therapy principles, and on the basis of a survey we came up with a list of thirty or so really effective books, and these then were purchased by the Welsh Assembly Government and placed in all four hundred public libraries in Wales, and prescription pads then given for book prescriptions to GPs and clinical psychologists, and psychiatric nurses, and so on, so that a rather strange thing that, you know going for some help to a GP, you might actually be given instead of, or maybe as well as, your prescription for an anti-depressant also a prescription for a book which you then take to the public library and you borrow a book for three months. What we do know is that this approach is actually very effective, surprisingly so. Bibliotherapy, therapy by the book, has been shown as highly effective and is indeed one of the treatments that's recommended by NICE in the UK.

CBT retains its effectiveness when delivered in all sorts of different media which means it's really very, very powerful indeed for that reason. If it were the case that something like psychoanalysis, for example, were effective then delivery would have to be one to one so it would not be, it might be effective but it would not be nearly as efficient. CBT potentially is a highly efficient way of delivering the benefits of psychological therapy to a wide range of people.