



NEWS

Psychotherapy on the decline

An analysis by Professor Aseem Majeed (Imperial College, London) and his colleagues has found that from 2008 to 2011 prescriptions for antidepressants rose 10 per cent per year. This research coincides with the latest figures from England that more prescriptions for antidepressants were written last year than ever before. This comes at a time when a growing literature shows that mental health patients, when given a choice, prefer psychology to drugs.

In spite of a substantial growth in the evidence base for cognitive behavioural therapy and other talking therapies in *Clinical Psychology Review* Brandon Gaudiano (Alpert Medical School of Brown University) and Ivan Miller (Butler Hospital, USA) confirm the decline.

A group led by Scott O. Lilienfeld at Emory University proposed that psychologists remain resistant to evidence-based practice, citing naive realism and belief in myths about human nature and recommending that improved psychology education and training practices are needed to challenge myths in student training.

Report based on news item
in *The Psychologist* October 2013

Diary Date for 2014

**BFMS AGM
in London
Saturday 5th April 2014**

Neurons Responsible for Creating Negative Memories

Researchers have been working with fly and mouse brains to understand how it is that 'false memories' are formed in the brain. Researcher Gero Miesenböck explained that the simple brain of a fly can tell us much about how more complex brains work. "As a general rule, biology tends to be conservative," he said. "It's rare that evolution invents the same process several times." And, he says, even simple organisms may turn out to have a "surprisingly rich mental life." And so it is with mice. Although mice are not people, the basic mechanisms of memory formation in mammals are evolutionarily linked.

UK researchers have found the 12 neurons in a fly brain responsible for creating negative memories. Neuroscientists at the University of Oxford have discovered a way to trigger behaviour in flies by selectively modifying neurons in their brain and stimulating them with a laser in order to simulate a learning experience. The experiment has important implications for the eventual development of a technology to create false human memories.

Scientists have also implanted a false memory in the brains of mice in an experiment, led by Dr Susumu Tonegawa, a neuroscientist at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, to provide detailed clues on how such memories form in human brains.

They caused mice to remember being shocked in one location, when in reality the electric shock was delivered in a completely different location. The finding, said Dr Tonegawa, is yet another cautionary reminder of how unreliable memory can be in mice and humans. The unreliability, he said, prompts a question about evolution: "Why is

our brain made in such a way that we form false memories?" No one knows but he wonders if it has to do with the creativity that allows humans to envision possible events and combinations of real and imagined events in great detail. That rich internal experience fuels work in the arts and sciences and other creative activities. "Unless you have that kind of ability, there is no civilization." But it could also provide raw material for false memories - a possible "tradeoff for this tremendous benefit."

THERAPY

Playing with Memory

Hypnotism gets a mixed bag of press. Some people immediately think back to the tacky stage shows of the 1980s with audience participation, ritual humiliation and onion eating. Then there are all those self-help books complete with their own hypnosis tapes from big name personalities and lesser known authors who have found something that works for them. Sometimes hypnosis works, sometimes it doesn't.

In either scenario there is little that can go wrong or cause any major trauma. If it doesn't work you just shrug your shoulders, toss the tape and try something else.

But problems can arise with hypnosis when people are involved, serious issues raised and words used in leading ways.

While hypnosis doesn't work for everyone it is something that should only be used in the hands of an expert. While you wouldn't dream of letting someone medically unqualified open up your stomach and remove your appendix it is all too easy to let someone unqualified delve into your mind and mess about with the contents.

Unfortunately hypnotherapy, like many other complimentary practices is not regulated by the government and is therefore open to abuse by charlatans who are in it not just from the money aspect (though at £395 for hypnotic gastric band 'therapy' this can be rather lucrative) but for self

rewarding reasons, seeing themselves as a healer and therefore someone to be looked up to and held in some esteem. Sometimes these are people who have had therapy themselves for their own issues and feel they are now passing on the benefits to others. They may well in all honesty imagine they are doing some good in the world, but in reality can be causing untold damage.

It is all too easy to fall victim to these people. When you are seeking help with anything from weight loss to smoking issues you will find Hypnotherapists advertising their services all over the web, in magazines and in the phone book. It is all too easy to be lured by a professional looking web site and flowery prose. We tend to think nowadays that anything remotely connected with our health and wellbeing must be above board and under some sort of government legislation. Alas, this is not the case and it is up to us, the consumer to be very vigilant and make all the necessary checks when we are looking into using any sort of therapy, especially hypnotherapy.

I recently stumbled upon a company offering hypnotic gastric band hypnotherapy through a magazine article and found a very slick looking web site that assured me the practitioners were clinical hypnotherapy consultants with over twenty years experience in various complimentary therapies.

I'm afraid I did not look any further than that. I took this at face value and telephoned them. They were extremely pleasant and seemed competent telling me how they worked on a four session system whereby the client would come to their office, receive the hypnotherapy and their food and diet related information for three weeks and then on the final week have the hypnotic gastric band 'fitted' which would mean the client would thereafter feel full very quickly and imagine that their stomach had shrunk from the size of a melon to that of a golf ball. They boasted of a 100% success rate and how one client had recently lost 12lb in one week. This all sounded too good to be true, for me it was.

I attended the sessions but found that the whole thing just didn't work for me, I'd lost the grand total of 3lbs and that was actually because I kicked off my shoes for the final weigh in.

When I told them that it hadn't worked I was

roundly accused of not doing it right, of not following their diet and exercise instruction (eat less, exercise more and drink two litres of water per day, hardly anything new there, in fact what we have been advised to do by health professionals and the media for a long, long time) and they even suggested that the hypnotherapy part was almost an extra. I had thought that this was the main part of their 'therapy' the part for which people were paying good money.

I was told I was an angry person who had issues and would never be able to move on with my life until I dealt with them. Now before you call me a complete idiot for not hanging up the phone on them and running for the hills, please bear in mind that I had spent at least two hours each session with them and told them how my weight issues were all mixed up with on and off depression, bulimia and a sometimes unhappy childhood. When you have issues with depression you are always looking for help to get a handle on it and find out why you have this debilitating condition. They had talked often of how early abuse can affect people in later life and said that depression and bulimia are often signs of this. One of the therapists themselves had survived horrific experiences in her past and said she could spot when a woman had been abused in the past and didn't even remember it. She said she had helped many people and even recently worked with a local hospital.

They offered me another session of hypnotherapy. This time to look into my past and see what was in there that could be causing all my unhappiness. I stupidly agreed and went back to them two days later.

I was told how prolific sexual abuse is, how it can lie hidden in the mind for so many years causing all manner of disturbances; depression, bulimia, endometriosis and a multitude of female problems.

I will not go into graphic detail here but will say that while I was under hypnosis for over two hours I kept telling them I couldn't see anything; I was told this was because it was all too horrific and my mind had switched off to protect me from what was happening. Questions were continually fired, getting more and more personal and intimate. I actually found myself agreeing to these dreadful things, coming up with sketchy scenarios

out of nowhere. Names, people and places.

The outcome of this verbal and mental battering was that I had apparently been abused by a doctor at aged six and by a friend of the family and worse yet my father as a baby. It was even suggested that my parents were part of a paedophile ring.

I was told that all this must be true as I had said it in my own words. That I could never move forward with my life unless I accepted this as my past.

I was devastated, hurt and confused.

The information I had been furnished with was a grotesque weight, a ticking bomb if you will. How many other lives, not just mine, could these words impact upon?

I was very fortunate to have a solid network of friends with contacts who could help and advise me and I made contact with the BFMS. I was quickly introduced to Dr Peter Naish, chairman of the Scientific and Professional Advisory Board to the British False Memory Society which was set up in 1993 in response to the rash of false claims of past child abuse by adults in therapy, especially hypnosis.

Dr Naish listened to my story and explained how these so called memories are completely false and only 'discovered' through leading questions and suggestions by the 'therapists' involved.

My case was a classic textbook illustration of how the misguided or poorly trained (if any training has actually taken place at all) 'therapist' can guide a patient into imagining the most repulsive and horrific scenarios from their childhoods. But here's the thing, these are imaginings, they are not real memories at all, for if they were indeed true there would have been other factors present throughout my life that would have acted as sign posts to such trauma. There was nothing at all, just the fact that a propensity for depression had led me to seek any sort of help that could explain the condition.

I am eternally grateful for the BFMS and the work that they do as a charity in helping people and families who have been embroiled in this despicable net of deceit perpetrated by so called professional therapists. I have worked with Dr

Naish to rebuild the loving memories of my parents that could so easily have been smashed beyond redemption by these callous, careless people who should not be permitted to dabble in people's minds in any way.

While I am well aware that there are dreadful crimes committed against innocent children and that the monsters that do these things should be exposed for the demons that they are. I now know that there are also people out there who can so easily be accused of such heinous crimes merely through the words of someone who has allegedly 'remembered' long forgotten secrets from their past at the hands of a so called caring expert.

We tend to think that hypnotherapy is harmless because of the way it is often portrayed as a form of entertainment, but any sort of hypnotherapy is invasive, when the patient is totally relaxed they are at the mercy of the hypnotherapist who can guide their thoughts and words by suggestion and question. While this can be used by honest and qualified practitioners for the patients good it can also be used and abused in sickening ways by charlatans. Without any system of statutory regulation it remains a case of *caveat emptor*.

If you are looking for a hypnotherapist I would strongly advise that you really do your homework. Check them out thoroughly as though you were thinking of employing them for a highly specialised and important job (you are, you are letting them mess with your mind!), follow links to alleged qualifications and ask for current references. Don't be fooled by a fancy web site and glossy brochures, and certainly don't fall into that oh so British trap of thinking that 'well they seem like awfully nice people to me'.

The author is a woman who first contacted the BFMS in September 2013

Madeline and Carolyn send our very best wishes for Christmas and the New Year

We send a special thank you to all our volunteers who have covered the helpline throughout the year.

BOOK REVIEWS

Abused by Therapy: How Searching for Childhood Trauma can Damage Adult Lives by Katharine Mair, 2013, Matador, pp291 Available in P/back and Kindle £10.99/4.79

Reviewed by Epaphras

I thought that with Richard McNally's 2003 book, *Remembering Trauma*, the memory wars had been settled in favour of sceptics who consider that false memories are the usual product of recovered memory therapy (RMT) which claims that hitherto unremembered childhood trauma can be discovered mainly by therapeutic methods. The sceptics include scientists who research psychological processes whereas believers in RMT are mostly psychotherapists, their clients and support groups/organisations. However, scientific conclusions do not deter people committed to belief in repression and dissociation as defence mechanisms that seal off childhood trauma from conscious awareness. The memory wars still continue, hence this 2013 book by a clinical psychologist. Katharine Mair covers the subject readably and in depth. She discusses child abuse and highlights the dangers of RMT. There is now a growing interest in dissociation as the mechanism for deep-freezing traumatic memories of child abuse and most of Mrs Mair's book addresses this development. Recent years have seen a dramatic rise in diagnoses of multiple personality now known as Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) and, by using such techniques as hypnosis, memories of terrible experiences emerge in some DID clients. When memories of past lives, alien abduction or birth trauma are produced by these methods they are rightly treated with scepticism but when following similar paths leads to recollections of child abuse, often extreme ritual, satanic and sadistic abuse, then true believers switch off their critical faculties and take a road that often ends in

tragedy. Mrs Mair's book needs to be taken seriously and not ignored or dismissed by organisations and individuals that include the excavation of supposed repressed and/or dissociated memories in their treatment plans. However, this particular therapy fad is so alluring to those who promote it that in spite of Ray Aldridge-Morris's *Multiple Personality: An Exercise in Deception* (1991) it has continued to grow. Mrs Mair describes a formidable range of organised support for it and this makes it difficult to oppose. However, the fundamental flaws of therapies based on repression/dissociation need to be continually exposed and their demise hastened. Her well informed book is a significant contribution in that direction but is also helpful in suggesting better approaches to human distress.

Reproduced by permission of Epaphras from his review on Amazon.co.uk

Betrayal of Memory by Sophie Meddowes, 2013 pp272 P/back and Kindle £10.95/4.02 Reviewed by a mother

I recently found myself in a situation, where my daughter, after seeing a Counsellor and Psycho-therapist for something completely different, accused her father (my husband) of sexual abuse, something which had not occurred.

After a number of months feeling numb and confused, I came across Sophie Meddowes' book 'Betrayal of Memory'. This insight into her ongoing experience, gave my husband and I valuable support at this distressing time. I realised that we were not alone and that other families were feeling the same anguish. It helped us make some sense of our own situation and circumstances.

As a result, we have become more focused, however whilst there is still a long way to go, we have been inspired by Sophie's book to stay positive and try to help our daughter find her way back to us.

LEGAL

Admitting new scientific evidence on appeal

In *Regina v Lunday*, before Lord Hope of Craighead, Dame Sian Elias, Lord Kerr of Tonaghmore, Lord Reed and Lord Hughes of Privy Council. Judgment October 7, 2013

When the prosecution's case against a convicted person rested exclusively or principally on scientific evidence and on appeal an application was made to admit new scientific material which presented a significant challenge to that evidence, the appeal court should not be astute to exclude the new material solely because it could have been obtained before the original trial.

So stated the Privy Council, allowing an appeal by the defendant Mark Edward Lundy, from a decision of the Court of Appeal of New Zealand on August 13, 2002, dismissing his appeal against his convictions on two counts of murder. A retrial was ordered. Two pieces of forensic evidence were crucial to the Crown's case and on appeal the defendant challenged the reliability of both pieces of evidence with evidence from other distinguished forensic experts.

Lord Kerr, giving the decision, said that the proper basis on which admission of fresh evidence should be decided was by the application of a sequential series of tests. If the evidence was credible, the question arose whether it was fresh in the sense that it was evidence which could not have been obtained for the trial with reasonable diligence.

If the evidence was both credible and fresh it should be generally admitted unless the court was satisfied at that stage that, if admitted, it would have no effect on the safety of the conviction.

If the evidence was credible but not fresh, the court should assess its strength and its potential impact on the safety of the conviction.

If it considered that there was a risk of miscarriage of justice if the evidence was excluded it should be admitted notwithstanding that the evidence was not fresh. The requirement that evidence be fresh could be of less critical importance in cases involving scientific evidence. The new evidence was plainly credible and was provided by experts distinguished in their fields.

Applying the test of whether the fresh evidence might reasonably have led to an acquittal, the Board concluded that the verdict was unsafe. It was felt that a re-trial was needed.

Law Report sourced from The Times, December 10, 2013

MEMBERS' FORUM

Interdenominational Prayer Group

Norman and Jean Brand, who, some will remember, have, for the past 12 years or so, been coordinating an interdenominational Christian group of BFMS members who have requested prayers for their family troubles, or who wish to pray for other families in their situation, report that there is a need to update their contact lists.

Many will have Norman and Jean's details, and they ask members of the group to make contact again, with any fresh information they may wish to give – and say whether they want that to be reported to other members or to be kept confidential.

Any BFMS people who would like to join this group are asked to contact Norman and Jean through the Bradford on Avon address.

Meanwhile, they apologise for having lost contact themselves during the past year. They have been in this role for a long time now and ask us to request that, if anyone would like to take over from them, they should make contact through the BFMS.

Scientific & Professional Advisory Board:

Professor R J Audley – Professor Emeritus of Psychology, University College London. **Professor Sir P P G Bateson, FRS** – Professor of Ethology, University of Cambridge. **Dr H Cameron** - Consultant Child Psychiatrist (Retired). **Professor M Conway** - Professor of Cognitive Psychology, City University, London. **Professor C C French** – Professor of Psychology, Goldsmiths, University of London. **Dr Fiona Gabbert** - Reader in Psychology, Goldsmiths, University of London. **Dr Cara Laney** – Visiting Assistant Professor of Psychology, Reed College, Portland, Oregon. **Mrs Katharine Mair** – Consultant Clinical Psychologist (Retired). **Mr D Morgan** – Child, Educational & Forensic Psychologist, London. **Dr P L N Naish (Chair)**– Visiting Reader in Psychology, The Sackler Centre for Consciousness Science, Sussex University. **Professor Elizabeth Newson** – Professor Emeritus of Developmental Psychology, University of Nottingham. **Dr J Ost** – Senior Lecturer in Psychology, International Centre for Research in Forensic Psychology, University of Portsmouth. **Dr. G Oxburgh** - Consultant Forensic Psychologist, Newcastle University. **Mr K Sabbagh** – Writer & Managing Director, Skyscraper Productions. **Dr B Tully** – Chartered Clinical & Forensic Psychologist, London. **Dr Kimberley Wade** – Assistant Professor of Psychology, University of Warwick. **Professor L Weiskrantz** – Professor Emeritus of Psychology, University of Oxford. **Professor D B Wright** – Professor of Psychology, Florida International University. Psychology, Florida International University.

BFMS Management and Administration

Madeline Greenhalgh, *Director*
Carolyn Dutch, *Administrator*

Bradford on Avon · Wiltshire · BA15 1NF
Tel: 01225 868682 Fax: 01225 862251

Email: bfms@bfms.org.uk
Website: www.bfms.org.uk

Registered Charity Number: 1040683