

## Special interest

### articles:

- John Walker workshop review
- Overcoming Grief, book review

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## Treating Health Anxiety and Fear of Death

### Professor John Walker

#### Kelly Buttigieg

AACBT student member &  
Doctor of Clinical Psychology  
Candidate, Monash University

Professor Walker's workshop was much anticipated, with all places filled well in advance. Prof. Walker began the workshop by asking attendees about their clinical settings. It was evident from the varied audience responses that the topic of health anxiety and fear of death was of interest to clinicians not only in adult settings, but also in the child and adolescent arena.

The workshop, based mainly on Prof. Walker and colleagues' recent book of the same name, focused in turn on health anxiety and fear of death. The two concerns are closely related, with fear of death often being a central concern for those experiencing health anxieties. The DSM-IV diagnostic criteria and clinical presentations relevant to health anxiety (e.g. hypochondriasis, somatisation disorder) were briefly reviewed. Clinical assessment and case formulation of health anxiety using Walker's CBT model was also discussed comprehensively. However, the focus of the day centred on specific CBT interventions for the problems of



health anxiety and fear of death respectively.

As Prof. Walker noted, randomised controlled trials (RCTs) suggest that CBT is an effective treatment for health anxiety in both group and individual treatments, with gains maintained at one-year follow-up. I found Prof. Walker's elaboration of specific exposure techniques (e.g. the narrative tool of writing a story about having an illness) particularly helpful, as was his discussion of management of physical symptoms using acceptance-based or distraction strategies. Prof. Walker emphasised specific points made during this stage of the workshop with videotaped reflections from an adolescent and adult patient with health anxiety.

Prof. Walker also discussed school refusal and the use of sick day plans for children experiencing health anxiety. How-

ever, the focus on child and adolescent applications was rather brief, and more time devoted to this client group would have been helpful.

In the afternoon, fear of death was examined, with Prof. Walker discussing ways to move from a state of avoidance to accepting the reality of one's death. Specific activities (e.g. writing one's own obituary as an exposure exercise) were discussed, with a view to increasing client acceptance of death and improving life satisfaction. A workshop exercise examining our own response to a hypothetical death scenario was also very illuminating!

As a doctoral student currently on placement in an oncology setting, anxiety about one's health and fear of death are both issues of relevance clinically. My previous learning regarding fear of death has centred on existential approaches such as that of Irvin Yalom, and it was helpful to learn how CBT may play a role in addressing these concerns. The comprehensive notes and handouts provided to all attendees will also assist us to implement specific techniques in our own clinical work.

**More exciting events this year...read on!**



## Book review

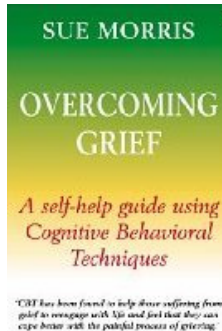
**Overcoming Grief: A Self-Help Guide Using Cognitive Behavioral Techniques**

Eliana Hirakis BA Psych (Hons), Psychologist &amp; AACBT QLD Secretary

Sue Morris, a Clinical Psychologist trained in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), gained extensive experience in treatment of bereavement throughout her time as head of the Bereavement Department at Old Colony Hospital in Boston, USA. Sue developed and facilitated a six-week support program for families of hospice patients at the Hospital. Sue identified the need for more open discussion about end of life issues during her time at the Bereavement Department, which possibly motivated her to produce a self-help guide for overcoming grief.

Sue draws upon evidence-based treatment for grief in her self-help guide. The use of excerpts detailing people's experiences of coping with grief helps to normalise and explain grieving processes. These excerpts also help to demonstrate the use of cognitive behavioural techniques for grief.

The book begins by discussing the importance of a person giving themselves permission to grieve and identifying physical and emotional manifestations of grief unique to the reader. Cognitive-behavioural strategies, including cognitive restructuring of unhelpful thoughts, behavioural activation and problem solving, are outlined in detail and ways to overcome associated barriers to



*“...provides helpful strategies for encouraging those who are grieving to move forward with their lives while maintaining a connection to the person they have lost.”*

implementing these techniques are discussed. One very useful component to this book is ‘dealing with difficult conversations’ where guidelines for discussing death with children are provided. This book also provides helpful strategies for encouraging those who are grieving to move forward with their lives while maintaining a connection to the person they have lost.

Sue very responsibly warns readers that reading a self-help book about grief is unlikely to be an enjoyable experience. She acknowledges that strong emotions may be triggered by its content. Sue also provides excellent guidelines by which readers can identify when they may need to seek the help of a psychologist or counsellor.

This book is likely to be challenging and confronting for many of its readers, particularly when reading about other people's experiences of loss. At the same time, it will

also normalise the process of grief and acknowledge that people grieve in different ways. The cognitive-behavioural techniques are clearly explained and barriers to implementation of these techniques are addressed.

This book is highly recommended for those who are seeking adaptive ways for dealing with loss. Very importantly, this book is recommended for those who are supporting a person through bereavement. The chapter titled ‘For Those Who Care’ outlines ways for people to most effectively support someone in overcoming their grief. This book is not only useful for people who are grieving or supporting someone through grief. It is also useful for students and practitioners in psychology, as the book clearly explains evidence-based strategies for overcoming grief.

**AACBT 32<sup>nd</sup> NATIONAL CONFERENCE**5<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> September 2009

Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre

<http://www.aacbtwa.org.au/>**Keynote speakers**Professor Tom Ollendick

CBT for Child &amp; Adolescent Anxiety Disorders

Professor Tom Borkovec

Interpersonal/Emotional Processing Therapies for Generalised Anxiety Disorder

Professor Tracey Wade

Perfectionism &amp; Eating Disorders

Dr Emily Holmes

Imagery &amp; Emotion

Professor Mark Dadds

Child Psychopathology

Professor Arnoud Arntz

Schema Focused Therapy for Personality Disorders



## Upcoming AACBT-Victoria events

### WORKSHOP

**A/Prof. Mervin Smucker**

Imagery Rescripting & Reprocessing Therapy (IRRT):  
Imagery Focused CBT for Trauma & PTSD

18-19 June 2009, Melbourne  
20 June 2009, Tasmania

Mervin Smucker is an Associate Clinical Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the Medical College of Wisconsin. He trained and worked with Professor Aaron T. Beck for 6 years at the University of Pennsylvania where he served as Director of Education and Clinical Training, and more recently has done collaborative work with Dr. Edna Foa. Recognized for his creative and innovative applications of imagery in CBT, A/Prof. Smucker has conducted hundreds of workshops and training seminars, and has trained thousands of clinicians on trauma and PTSD.

IRRT is a new treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It is especially useful for patients struggling with distressing, intrusive imagery. It can be used in combination with imaginal exposure, mastery imagery, and cognitive restructuring but goes beyond extinction models to alter recurring images of the trauma and create more adaptive schemas. It is particularly useful for addressing non-*FEAR* emotions (e.g., guilt, shame, anger) which are often not adequately addressed by simple habituation models (the basis of prolonged exposure). IRRT has demonstrated efficacy for PTSD, particularly the treatment of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. This technique is applicable across a wide range of psychological disorders including depression, social phobia, specific phobias, OCD, eating disorders and suicidality. Please see the attached articles for further information on IRRT. This workshop will be at an introductory level. A/Prof. Smucker will be presenting an advanced level workshop on this topic at the 33rd AACBT National Conference in Melbourne next year.

### PUB DISCUSSION

**Dr Monica O'Kelly**

Setting up private practice  
5th July 2009

### AACBT 33<sup>rd</sup> NATIONAL CONFERENCE

"Rising to the challenge: CBT and complexity"

17th - 20th April 2010

MELBOURNE

#### Keynote speakers

Art Freeman

CBT for personality disorders in  
children and adolescents

Jackie Persons

CBT case formulation

Alan Fruzzetti

DBT, high conflict couples

Robyn Walser

ACT introductory and for PTSD

Mervin Smucker

IRRT for PTSD - advanced

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**baseline autumn 09**

**What's on...**

**Victoria**

12 June 2009...APS Workshop, Dr Monica O'Kelly - Advanced CBT [www.psychology.org.au](http://www.psychology.org.au)  
18/19 June 2009...AACBT workshop, A/Prof Mervin Smucker - IRRT-Imagery focused CBT for trauma & PTSD [www.aacbtvic.org.au](http://www.aacbtvic.org.au) (+ 20/6/09 in Tasmania)  
5 July 2009...AACBT pub discussion, Dr Monica O'Kelly - Setting up private practice [www.aacbtvic.org.au](http://www.aacbtvic.org.au)  
3 July 2009...Workshop, Sonja Skokic - An introduction to Interpersonal Psychotherapy for Anxiety and Depression [www.reconnexion.org.au](http://www.reconnexion.org.au)  
14 July 2009...Workshop, Tomi Redman - Alleviating Anxiety & Depression with substance using clients [www.reconnexion.org.au](http://www.reconnexion.org.au)  
22 September 2009...Workshop, Tomi Redman - Creative Approaches to CBT [www.reconnexion.org.au](http://www.reconnexion.org.au)

**National**

22 May 2009...Addressing non-melancholic depression in the anxious worrier and the perfectionist [www.blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au)  
24 June 2009...Focused psychological strategies - recovery & resilience in mood disorders [www.blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au)  
25 June 2009...Building resilience to mood disorders - risk reduction, relapse prevention and maintenance strategies [www.blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au)  
1 September 2009...TheMHS annual conference, Perth, WA  
5 September 2009...32nd AACBT National Conference, Perth, WA  
4 October 2009...Mental Health Week, NSW

**International**

2 September 2009...World Federation of Mental Health World Congress, Athens, Greece  
16 September 2009...39th Annual Congress of European Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Therapy (EABCT), Dubrovnik, Croatia

**If you would like to list your events here for free, please email details of date, title and contact details to [lisa.catania@mh.org.au](mailto:lisa.catania@mh.org.au)**

**We're on the web!**  
**[www.aacbtvic.org.au](http://www.aacbtvic.org.au)**

**RENEW YOUR  
MEMBERSHIP  
FOR 2009!**

**Join the team...**

If you are interested in joining the Victorian branch executive committee, please contact our president, Leanne Hides, via our website. We would love to hear from you!

**News and views...**

- \* AACBT is doing its best for the environment - all correspondence to members will be electronic.
- \* Credit card payments are now processed through RegisterNow to allow immediate processing. Please contact us if you have any questions or comments about this new system.
- \* Remember that your AACBT membership expired on 31st December 2008 - renew online via our secure website.

**To submit news and views, email [lisa.catania@mh.org.au](mailto:lisa.catania@mh.org.au)**