



MEDIA

'Media' is the page of the Society's Press Committee. This section of *The Psychologist* aims to promote and discuss psychology in the media. If you would like to comment on a recent newspaper article, TV programme or radio broadcast involving psychology, if you have tips for others based on recent experiences, or if you know of a forthcoming programme or broadcast, please contact the 'Media' page coordinating editor, Harriet Gross (Chair, Press Committee), on H.Gross@lboro.ac.uk.

A headstart for happiness

ON 19 June the London School of Economics (LSE) published *The Depression Report*, a new deal for depression and anxiety disorders (see tinyurl.com/j2t8f). Press coverage began before then and continued to grow in the following weeks.

The report urges the government to increase therapy services and offer treatments that work instead of ones without much science behind them. Mostly this means cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) for people suffering from chronic anxiety and depression. The report, based on the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines, gained good coverage in *The Guardian* and its sister paper *The Observer*, which between them published five pieces and three letters to the editor.

Guardian journalist Mary O'Hara, who covered the report on 21 June, told me that 'it's really important for us to cover these stories and to do them well'. *The Guardian* did just that. It picked up the news first on 16 June, even before the report was published, and printed a poignant analogy to cancer treatments. Professor Richard Layard, author of the report, said that if NICE recommended a new cancer treatment that was slightly effective and it was unavailable to sufferers, there would be uproar in the tabloids and the TV news. Yet the scenario with mental illness is that NICE recommend effective treatments that are still unavailable to thousands of people.

The Observer published three pieces on 18 June, including one with the headline 'Therapy on NHS must be increased'. This piece talked more about depression than anxiety, although the LSE report covered



Local launch of the CBT scheme in Newham

both. It also left out important details, such as the lasting impact of CBT, giving better results months after treatment has finished than drug treatments do. The LSE report was absolutely clear about this, saying that therapy has longer-lasting effects than drugs, and when people recover from anxiety with CBT, they are unlikely to relapse.

Professor David Clark, who co-chaired the report, told me that the press coverage was in general positive. 'However, some of the articles portrayed CBT as overly simplistic, underestimating the sophisticated nature of the treatment when delivered by appropriately trained therapists,' he said.

The coverage also focused more on depression than anxiety disorders, perhaps simply because of the report's title. But David Clark said: 'Anxiety disorders are common, and future media attention should focus on them, particularly as anxiety is a more persistent disorder than depression and there are enormous benefits to providing people with good treatments for anxiety.'

The most colourful coverage of the report ran in *The Guardian* on 21 June. It described the new treatment centres the report calls for as 'happiness centres' and said they are like 'Ikea for the mind, where the feelgood factor is flatpacked for you to take home.'

But not everyone felt positive about the report. One letter published in *The*

Guardian on 21 June called the CBT approach a quick-fit orthodoxy and said that there is no evidence that it works for treatment-resistant depression. Therefore, the letter said, psychodynamic psychotherapies should be given to these patients. However, the letter failed to offer any evidence supporting these other therapies.

Two positive letters followed this, one by Professor Sheila Hollins (President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists) who welcomes the call for more trained therapists to give treatments that work.

Unfortunately the tabloids did not pick up the report. But Mary O'Hara said that perhaps that wasn't all bad. 'The tabloids have a way of distorting mental health issues by running these kinds of stories next to photos of threatening men holding knives. It gives the wrong message,' she said. However, perhaps we do need the findings to trickle down to the tabloids, to reach a truly large number of people.

Mary O'Hara has covered several health stories for *The Guardian* and said she had learned a lot about CBT and mental illness over the last year. She plans to follow up the report in six months and ask 'What's happening now? What changes have been made?' This willingness to follow up is good practice in journalism and psychology alike. While initial reports may grab headlines, it is long-term results that matter most.

Jennifer Wild

TIP OF THE MONTH

Don't forget the visual aspect of stories. You should keep a stock digital photo of yourself ready to send out to journalists writing about you or quoting you. If you're doing research think about how you might capture images to help illustrate it in print.

■ Next media training days – Broadcast Interview Skills (21 August), Introduction to Working with the Media (18 September). Contact Dawn Schubert – mediatraining@bps.org.uk or tel: 0116 252 9581.