

# Oxford Student Mental Health Network

OSMHN Newsletter Autumn 2005 Issue 10

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## Welcome to OSMHN's 10th Newsletter

Welcome to OSMHN's 10th newsletter. As always, OSMHN continues to evolve.

- ❖ Deborah Williamson, who was OSMHN's original administrator, has rejoined the team as web site manager. An article in this issue explains what she has been up to. Barbara Jackson continues as the Administrator.
- ❖ The Steering Group has continued to meet and has focused recently on reviewing services for students with mental health difficulties. OSMHN is in a unique position to gather information from its member organizations in order to identify gaps and in services.
- ❖ Members of the Steering Group continue to liaise with key teams and working parties in the Mental Health sector. They also continue to support the publication of the Newsletter and the maintenance of the Web Site
- ❖ The Network Group have met regularly and have recently welcomed as participants students representing both Students' Unions from Brookes and Oxford University. Plans are afoot to hold an event for staff that will be linked with the Brookes Students' Union planned Mental Health Campaign in Semester 2.

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## OSMHN's newsletter needs you

A primary aim of the OSMHN network is to enable the sharing of information, knowledge and experience of student mental health issues across the education, health and voluntary sectors in Oxfordshire. Our newsletter is a key mechanism for achieving this.

In addition to the usual news items about upcoming events, this issue includes contributions from University and College of FE counsellors, a University Health Visitor and a Study Skills Advisor.

OSMHN would love to hear from you if you have any information which you feel would be of interest to others within the local network. Even if you do not have anything to include for publication, we always welcome your ideas and suggestions for the content of the newsletter. **Please get in touch if you would like a printed version of this issue.**

Please e-mail [osmhn@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:osmhn@brookes.ac.uk).

### **Psycho-educational Groups for Managing Depression and Anxiety**

The Counselling and Psychology Service, which operates in GP practices in Oxford City, are running two psycho-educational groups for managing anxiety and depression. The groups use a Cognitive Behavioural approach, which looks at how your thoughts and behaviours influence the way you feel. This is a practical approach and people are encouraged to practise new skills and strategies in between sessions. The groups involve a mixture of presentation and small group discussion. Whilst we encourage people to participate as much as possible, people are not expected to disclose personal information.

The groups are led by a Clinical Psychologist and a Psychology Assistant and each group usually has between 10 and 20 people attending. They run for eight two-hour sessions on a termly basis and the location and time varies each term. The group aims to help people with a mild to moderate level of difficulty as we are not able to support vulnerable people between the sessions.

Anyone interested in more information should contact their GP, Counsellor, Psychologist or Mental Health Professional. They will be able to advise when the next group is running and whether or not you are suitable to attend. The Oxford University Counselling Service run similar groups and Oxford Brookes University are planning to start their own groups shortly.

For your interest, here is some brief feedback from previous groups:

‘The best thing about the group was learning about my problem and socialising with others’

‘I was able to work through matters with others and realise that I am not alone’

‘I learnt life skills which really improved my perspective’

### **Oxford Brookes Counselling Service**

#### **LEARNING TO BE ASSERTIVE TRAINING WORKSHOPS FOR STUDENTS**

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| WHEATLEY:      | Monday November 7 <sup>th</sup> 4.00-6.00 p.m. Room EL20         |
| HARCOURT HILL: | Monday November 14 <sup>th</sup> 6.00 – 8.00 p.m. Room CG/02     |
| GIPSY LANE:    | Wednesday November 23 <sup>rd</sup> 2.00 – 4.00 p.m. Boardroom 1 |

To reserve a place, contact: Anne Grisbrooke on [agrisbrooke@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:agrisbrooke@brookes.ac.uk) or Tel: (48)4650

## **Solution Focused Approach for Staff Dealing with Students**

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By Annette Honeywell, Counsellor, Oxford Brookes, Student Services

### **What is a Solution Focused approach?**

In many ways the Solution Focused approach is based on common sense and normal practice. What makes it distinctive is that it focuses more on the solution and the positives in a situation, rather than getting weighed down or stuck on just the problems. It also believes that we all have a wealth of strengths and positive coping strategies that generally have served us well in functioning in normal life. It believes in identifying these strengths (which often go unsung) and building on what works.

The main characteristics therefore are:

- Focusing on the solution and not the problem
- Identifying the strengths and positive ways to cope with issues, based on past experience and building on these. How have we successfully solved problems before?
- Looking for the exceptions to a problematic situation (i.e. few problems are 100% - 24/7. What is going on when it is not around? What works?)

To show how this approach can be used in everyday life, I will draw on an Induction talk I recently gave to students at the beginning of the academic year.

### **The problem: Feeling overwhelmed with a myriad of feelings at the start of the academic year**

I decided to identify and address the problem that probably most students would be feeling rather overwhelmed with feelings – excitement, anticipation, fear, anxiety, confusion, loneliness etc., and therefore feeling under stress. I felt it would be useful for them to hear the problem spelt out and “normalised”, (there is comfort in knowing that you aren’t the only one feeling overwhelmed). I set the problem within the context of a change in circumstances: new environment, new course, new colleagues, etc. and normalising that CHANGE = STRESS

My next aim was to help them identify how stress can manifest in various ways, and particularly for them to think of how it affects them personally.

- Physical – heightened pulse & heart rate, shallow breathing, anxiety attacks, headaches, migraines, stomach cramps, sweating etc.
- Behavioural – disturbance in sleeping and eating habits, under or over-eating, not sleeping, or lethargic; social withdrawal.
- Emotional – erratic mood swings, increased irritability or tearfulness, angry outburst, low mood – depression, excitability.
- Mental – distorted thinking patterns (e.g. “I’m useless – everyone else is coping; No-one likes me; I’m going to fail; I’m no good”); difficulty in concentration, taking in information, memory lapses, difficulty at being creative with information.

**The solution: Taking control of a stressful situation to manage it appropriately.**

The solution in this scenario was the reminder that they already have good coping strategies in managing stress (having already successfully done exams & interviews to get here) and that they need to identify what works for them in managing their stress. It was also important to remind them that instead of resorting to negative coping strategies if the stress becomes overwhelming (e.g. overusing alcohol, comfort eating or not eating, self-harming, avoidance etc.) that there is support out there – friends, tutors, staff, Student Support and the Counselling service.

I provided information on basic stress management techniques:

- Exercise – even just a daily brisk walk
- Eating sensibly and a balanced diet – even just small snacks
- Drinking water
- Managing alcohol consumption
- Adequate sleep or rest
- Relaxation time – quiet down time
- Sharing a problem, talking with friends
- Breaking a problem down into small manageable portions, and taking it one at a time. Prioritising tasks.
- Challenge negative thinking and self put-downs
- Remembering their strengths and positive qualities (which often get lost) and building on them.
- Seeking help earlier rather than later – personal tutor, academic tutors, counsellor etc.

So, in conclusion the SF approach was first to identify clearly the problem and place it in context. The solution then was to enable students to take control of the situation and identify their own stress management programme. This was done by normalising the situation, by giving students information about stress and asking them to identify how stress impacts on them individually, by building on their existing positive coping strategies and giving them some reminders of basic stress management techniques.

**More Help for Students**

Upgrade is a new resource at Brookes. It is a confidential service for anyone who wants advice on statistics or maths, or anything to do with study skills. Through making advice easily accessible, Upgrade will help to prevent students from becoming demoralized by academic difficulties.

There are Upgrade drop-in times on all four campuses. Contact us for details at:

[upgrade@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:upgrade@brookes.ac.uk)

[www.brookes.ac.uk/services/upgrade](http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/upgrade)

**University Counselling Service (North Campus)**



## *Working with students at risk of suicide*

**Monday 12<sup>th</sup> December 2005  
2:00pm – 5:00pm  
London Metropolitan University, London N7**

Clients presenting at risk of suicide can challenge the novice or the most experienced counsellors. The fear of 'getting it wrong' in addition to the powerful emotions that can be generated when a client contemplates suicide requires careful attention. This Continuing Professional Development Workshop provides practitioners with a safe space in which they can explore issues of 'self' in relation to other's suicidal ideations. The workshop uses different approaches such as formal information delivery, small and large group discussion and other experiential learning.

**Andrew Reeves** MA CQSW ProfDipSW DipCouns Cert Supervision MBACP (Accred)

**Andrew is an experienced counsellor, supervisor and trainer and works for the University of Liverpool Counselling Service. He previously worked as a Counsellor and Social Worker in secondary mental health services and in an emergency Mental Health Crisis Response Team. He has worked with suicidal clients for many years. His research has explored the implications for counsellors in their work with suicidal clients and is soon to complete his doctorate in this area. He has written several articles about working with suicide risk, including co-authoring the BACP Information Sheet, "Working with Suicidal Clients".**

**Fee: £25.00** (You are encouraged to book early as places are limited)

**Booking:** The event is hosted by London Metropolitan University

Further information and booking form contact:

[alice.cook@londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:alice.cook@londonmet.ac.uk)

Telephone: 020 7133 2093

### **The National Union of Students**

The NUS are running a campaign this year on Mental Health hoping to educate students and encourage them to help abolish the stigma attached to many mental health issues. Students can access fact sheets on a number of student welfare issues through their web site:  
**nusonline.co.uk**

## **Web Site News**

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If you haven't visited the OSMHN web site recently, log on to <http://www.brookes.ac.uk/osmhn!>

The OSMHN website is now being updated and maintained on a regular basis and acts as an online resource for local students, HE/FE staff, healthcare staff and researchers alike. The site aims to address some of the common questions and concerns many of us have about student mental health, for example: How can I recognise and support a student with a mental health problem? Where can I find out about what support is available locally for students with mental health problems? Where can I find out about the implications of current disability discrimination legislation for my institution? Where can I find out about national research findings into student mental health?

If you can't find what you are looking for on the site, we have also provided details of local and national mental health organisations and mental health web sites. We have, as far as possible, tried to include the most relevant but always welcome new contributions. Therefore, if you have come across a useful web site or work for a local organisation which you would like to include on our site, please send details to [osmhn@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:osmhn@brookes.ac.uk) or add details through the link at the bottom of the resources pages.

By browsing the 'About OSMHN' section of the site, staff and students will also be able to find past and current Project Newsletters, previous Project Reports / research findings and details of forthcoming workshops.

Feedback on the web site and suggestions for new additions would be very welcome.

### **Self-help via the OSMHN Web Site**

[How to cope with the stress of student life](#) Mind have produced a booklet aimed at students about the stresses of life in Higher Education. A printed version of the booklet is available for a small charge from Mind. Alternatively, a non-printable version can be accessed free of charge from the site.

[Student counselling self-help leaflets](#) The student counselling web site provides lists of all the self help materials provided by UK institutions.

[USA self help materials for students](#) This is a set of links to more than 700 'virtual pamphlets' in more than 90 USA and other universities. These pamphlets are web pages of ideas to help with all sorts of student problems, from how to take notes to how to cope with alcoholic parents.

### **Studying and exam guidance**

Imperial College, London's web site includes advice and guidance on studying techniques, exam stress and dealing with anxiety.

[How to cope with exam stress](#) Mind have produced a leaflet for students on coping with exams.

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## **Oxford and Cherwell Valley College Counselling Service**

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An update by Bill Ogden

Rachel Teare and Bill Ogden are the counsellors. Rachel is based in Banbury and Bill in Oxford although both can be available on all four campuses. Rachel is .5, Bill is full time term time. We are an integral part of Student Support services where we all help each other as required and are able.

In 04/05 the first year the College has had a cross college service we were contacted by 182 students, seeing 153. As the services profile is raised so the numbers will increase The Counselling Service has no formal links with the Primary Care Trusts or CMHN. There has been some informal contact with a CPN at the Warneford; this was with the student's permission and at their instigation. The service also works closely with Caroline Cockman (Connexions) particularly around issues of sexual health, pregnancy and housing.

I imagine University counsellors see students with similar issues to College students but are more closely linked to other health professionals. We occasionally see students with severe learning and behavioural difficulties and those who are classed as vulnerable adults. We see young people under 18, including those who are already living independently and their attendant problems. Like all counselling services, we treat all the students as individuals worthy of respect and dignity.

## **The Role of the University Health Visitor**

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by Anna Hinton, Specialist Health Visitor, RGN HV BA (Hons) MSc

As the University health visitor based at Oxford Brookes University and part of St.Bartholomew's Medical Centre's Primary Health Care Team, my role is to promote the health of students working with the university and Students' Union. I provide University wide advice and health information on an array of health topics and work with groups or individual students, particularly in relation to mental health.

My stress clinic runs every week throughout the semester offering a problem-solving solution focused approach to the range of issues that students request support for. The issues tend to focus on overcoming stress and anxiety, time management, presentation anxiety, low self-esteem, poor sleep, drinking problems or concerns about drug use, eating problems and unplanned pregnancy. Sometimes students are referred on to other support services or linked into the Primary Health Care Team and their GP.

I also work closely with the counsellors, running joint workshops for groups and publish a series of student support leaflets. I am concerned with promoting the mental health of the whole academic community and I am currently working with the Students' Union planning to raise the profile of mental health through an awareness campaign in Semester 2

Further information is available on Oxford Brookes' Student Health and Wellbeing website: [www.brookes.ac.uk/student/services/health](http://www.brookes.ac.uk/student/services/health)

## News from the Students Unions

- ❖ Oxford University Students Union have recently published an Eating Disorder Guide for Students which is aimed at students who think they may have an eating disorder and also concerned friends. They also hope to organise more mini-seminars on student issues .
- ❖ Oxford Brookes University Students Union are planning a mental health awareness campaign in semester 2. As plans for events unfold, OSMHN will help to publicise them.

### **The Role of the College Nurse**

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By Yo Davies BSc RGN RMN Hertford College

#### **Reassurance, Recognition and Referral**

#### **The role of the College Nurse in relation to Mental Health**

Oxford University does not have a central health centre and so most of the Oxford Colleges employ a senior nurse to deal with student health... The three Rs in my title are to indicate some of the skills we use. Aside from the inevitable colds, 'flu and sports injuries mental health is a large part of our work. The nurse is often the first port of call when a student is experiencing mental distress of any sort. The brevity of the academic terms at Oxford means that problems need to be identified and dealt with quickly or students' work will suffer.

We encourage students to seek help early because often problems are not as severe as first thought and one or two empathic listening sessions may be all that is required. Problems range from adjustment issues relating to leaving home or country, change in perceived status, parental divorce or difficulty making friends.

There are more enduring problems that students present with for example eating disorders. The nurse is often instrumental in enabling students to accept referral to mental health services and expert help. We can then continue to provide support whilst treatment is underway.

Depression is not uncommon and distinguishing between sadness following bereavement or the break up of a relationship is part of our assessment. Nurses work closely with local GPs who work as College Doctors and they are available for further consultation and to prescribe medication. I provide Problem Solving therapy to students with mild to moderate depression. This has been shown to be as effective as an anti depressant. The University Counselling Service accepts referrals from students and provides valuable support and treatment.

Exam related anxiety rears its head as the summer exams approach. Several college nurses offer relaxation classes during Trinity Term and teach stress management techniques. Sadly it

is often those who are most stressed who feel they have the least time to learn how to control their feelings.

Severe Mental illness also occurs amongst students and recognition of psychotic illness is very important. It is fortunately infrequent and again requires quick referral to the Community mental health team. The nurse again will provide ongoing support and, with the student's permission, liaise with their academic tutors.

It is most important that the College nurse is seen as an accessible and knowledgeable person who can be spoken to in confidence. Confidentiality is only broken if there is danger to the student or others because of what has been disclosed. All College Nurses have group supervision from the University Counselling Service.

## **Self Help from MIND**

MIND publish a number of useful publications one of which is "How to Improve Your Mental Well Being" by Dorothy Rowe. Contents include:

- ❖ What do we mean by good mental health?
- ❖ Why do some people become mentally distressed when others don't?
- ❖ What can I do about it?
- ❖ What can I do about the things I can't change?
- ❖ How can I stay well while caring for others who are in mental distress?
- ❖ References
- ❖ Useful organisations
- ❖ Further reading

The MIND publications can be accessed on the internet at [publications@mind.org.uk](mailto:publications@mind.org.uk)

### **Advance Notice!**

**Brookes staff and students are invited to join in "Brookes Goes Walking" on Wednesday 5 April. Walking, especially in good company, is a great stress buster!**

## **OSMHN Steering Committee**

### **Members**

OSMHN is supported and advised by a Steering Group consisting of representatives from its partner institutions. The present members are as follows:

#### ***Oxford University***

Elsa Bell, Head of Counselling  
Dame Fiona Caldicott, Principal of Somerville College  
Lady English, Chair of Student Health and Welfare Committee  
Alan Percy, Deputy Head, Counselling Service  
Ann Poulter, Disability Adviser

#### ***Oxford Brookes University***

Keith Cooper, Head of Student Services (Chair)  
Marion Casey, Head of Counselling  
Sue Wilkinson, Counsellor

#### ***Oxford College of Further Education***

Vivienne Miles, Manager of Student Support

#### ***Oxford City Primary Care Trust***

Yvonne Taylor, Head of Mental Health  
Anna Hinton, Specialist Health Visitor

#### ***Oxfordshire Mental Healthcare NHS Trust***

June Dent, Consultant Clinical Psychologist  
Samantha Holmes, Service Director for the City CMHT  
John Pearce, Adult Services Management Team

#### ***General Practitioners***

Dr. Ann Bevan, St Bartholmews Medical Practice  
Dr. Neil MacLennan, College Doctor

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### **OSMHN contact details**

OSMHN is unable to offer direct support or advice to students, but aims to collaborate with those organisations and services that are involved in supporting students with mental health problems. OSMHN is currently staffed by a part-time

administrator one day a week, Barbara Jackson, who can be contacted at:

c/o Student Services  
Oxford Brookes University  
The Lodge  
Harcourt Hill Campus  
OX2 9AT