

Brief Report on Innovative IPT-G Group for Doctors with Depression

I thoroughly enjoyed and valued completing my IPT-G Training with the IPT Centre at the University of Surrey with teaching and supervision from Dr Susan Howard and Dr Brian Solts. IPT-G has shown particular applicability in clinical populations where there is shame, stigma and isolation, such as in mothers with postnatal depression. I was interested to explore whether IPT-G would be an acceptable and effective therapy for treating healthcare professionals with depression, who are another group with high levels of shame, stigma and isolation. Doctors have much higher levels of depression and suicide than the general population, and do not access help because of shame and stigma. They are known to be a high-risk and difficult-to-engage clinical group.

I treated six doctors of differing specialties and seniority with IPT-G over 20 weeks. Inclusion criteria were referral to secondary care psychiatric services, meeting the diagnostic criteria for a current episode of moderate or severe depression, and assessed as psychologically minded.

IPT-G was shown to be an acceptable and effective treatment for doctors with depression. The doctors benefitted from the standard IPT strategies and techniques, and they also valued the more generic group therapeutic factors such as the installation of hope, universality, altruism, interpersonal learning and cohesiveness. All the doctors completed the group. Clinical, occupational and patient experience outcomes were excellent.

Shame, stigma and perceived isolation is very pronounced in doctors suffering from mental illness, and to be able to work in a psychotherapy group with other doctors in the same situation was highly beneficial for them. The opportunity for altruism was also very valuable, especially for a group of doctors who could not work due to ill health. This group approach using IPT-G stressed the particular added value of group work in this homogenous population with a high level of shame, stigma and isolation.

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