Literature Review on Computerised Cognitive Behavioural Therapy in Public Libraries
July 2008

An annotated literature review

1. Introduction

A literature search was undertaken for evidence of work on computerised cognitive behaviour therapy (cCBT), specifically in libraries. Since material on this area turned out to be non-existent the search was broadened to include general research in the area.

Material was sought on the two related areas of bibliotherapy and Books on Prescription. Related material on reading and reminiscence groups meeting in public libraries has also been included. Lastly a selection of key government publications was included, to provide context for the review.

The result is a broad cross-section of material. This includes the background to cCBT, from the government perspective, material which demonstrates public libraries' championing of reading as a means to emotional health, randomised controlled trial reports and other reviews of cCBT programs and general information on health interventions in public libraries.

2. Bibliotherapy and Books on Prescription

Excellent work has been done in this area, both by Debbie Hicks, of the Reading Agency[i], and by a team of researchers in the West Midlands, led by David Chamberlain[ii]. Working to a brief set by the Museums Libraries and Archives Council, Ms Hicks provides a thorough-going audit of work in the related fields of bibliotherapy and Books on Prescription, with detailed case studies and contact details for many of the key projects.

The work of Chamberlain and his team is complementary to the Hicks audit. Their project was in two parts: the first a literature review of what Chamberlain calls "Information on prescription", and the second a survey sent out to those library authorities who subscribe to national survey standards. The returns were written up into a summary document, which underlines the quality and breadth of bibliotherapy and Books on Prescription in England.

In addition to the academic work done in this area, the subject of books as therapy has captured the attention of the media. As early as 2002, the Guardian was reporting on the pioneering being carried out in Kirklees, under the banner "*The Reading and You Scheme*" (RAYS)[iii]. The scheme was set up as a result of a brainstorming session amongst library staff.

Six years later, Blake Morrison, in the same newspaper, reports on the rise of book groups[iv], specifically those that have a therapeutic function, and notes:

"These reading groups aren't just about helping people feel less isolated or building their self-esteem. More ambitiously, they're an experiment in healing, or, to put it less grandiosely, an attempt to see whether reading can alleviate pain or mental distress"

Significantly Morrison also points out that the groups often involve the traditionally marginalised, such as

> *"Val and Chris from a homeless hostel, Stephen who suffers from agoraphobia and panic attacks and hasn't worked for 15 years, Brenda who's bipolar, Jean who's recovering from the death of her husband, and Louise who has Asperger's syndrome"*.

3. Computerised Cognitive Behavioural Therapy: specific programs.

There is a growing literature on cCBT programs, most of it in the form of randomised controlled trials. Amongst the programs covered are *Beating the Blues* (Cavanagh, 2006, Hunt, 2006), *MoodGym* (Christensen, 2004, 2006a, 2006b, Griffiths, 2004, Kearney, 2006), *Overcoming Depression on the Internet (ODIN)*(Clarke, 2002, 2005), *Blue Pages*(Christensen, 2004), and *Assisted Bibliotherapy* (Reeves, 2005)

Most of the work done concludes that all the programs have something to offer the user. Little has been done to determine whether any program encourages self-help. An example of a trial that does just that is Christensen (2006b), where the authors compare the effectiveness of *Blue Pages* and *MoodGym* in encouraging self-help. The conclusion is that Blue Pages does encourage self-help whereas MoodGym does not.

Many of these programs, as well as others such as *Living Life to the Full* and *Feel Better,* are reviewed by Kevin Gournay, in a booklet published by the British Association of Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapists. As Professor Gournay points out[v]:

> *"These studies reinforce the view that, as time goes on the internet will become even more important to those with mental health problems."*

4. Government Publications

A number of important initiatives, including two important white papers on health, *Choosing Health (2004)* and *Our Health Our Care Our Say (2006),* have emphasised the government's commitment to health promotion and healthier lifestyles. Important developments in the field of emotional health have also played a part. In 2006, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) published its technology appraisal *Computerised cognitive behaviour therapy for depression and anxiety*. The subsequent publication *Commissioning a Brighter Future: improving access to psychological therapies*, brought out in 2007 by the Care Services Improvement Partnership, and provided a framework for implementing the cCBT program.

The success of the Choice project has led Health Link to propose public libraries to the Department of Health as the most suitable venues for delivery of computerised cognitive behaviour therapy and to accept a commission to develop a feasibility study.

5. Self-Help interventions

Aside from the work done by public libraries in the fields of bibliotherapy and books on prescription, there is a growing body of professional literature testifying to the efficacy

of self-help interventions. This places more responsibility for patient care on the patient him/herself. As one survey demonstrates[vi], there still remains work to be done in the field:

> *"Although self-help interventions are effective in treating depression, less is known about the factors that determine effectiveness (i.e. moderators of effect). This study sought to determine whether the content of self-help interventions, the study populations or aspects of study design were the most important moderators."*

6. Public Libraries and Health

There is a growing body of work in the field of public libraries and health. The house journal for public library staff, *Public Library Journal,* regularly features articles on topics such as Healthy Living Centres, reminiscence groups and information on prescription.

Literature on health is similarly revealing, on subjects such as the reliability of health information on the internet:

> *"A major use of the internet is for health information-seeking. The authors note that there has been little research into its use in relation to mental health. This survey aimed to investigate the prevalence of internet use for mental health information-seeking and its relative importance as a mental health information source.*
>
> *Eighteen per cent of all internet users surveyed had used the internet for information related to mental health. The prevalence was higher among those with a past history of mental health problems and those with current psychological distress. Only 12% of respondents selected the internet as one of the three most accurate sources of information, compared with 24% who responded that it was one of the three sources they would use. The major conclusion was that internet has a significant role in mental health information-seeking. The authors noted, however, that the internet is used more than it is trusted".* [vii]

[i] Hicks (2006) *An audit of bibliotherapy/books on prescription activity*. Arts Council & Museums Libraries and Archives Council.

[ii] Chamberlain, D. (2008) *Bibliotherapy and information prescriptions*. Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing 15 (p24-36)

[iii] Cunningham, D. (2002) *Tea and empathy*. Guardian, 24th April 2002, accessed 22.4.08

[iv] Morrison, B. (2008) *The Reading Cure*. Guardian, 5th January 2008, accessed 22.4.08

[v] Gournay, K. (2007) *Review of free to access computerised cognitive behaviour therapy websites*. British Association of Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapists.

[vi] Gellatly, J. (2007) *What makes self help interventions effective in the management of depressive symptoms?* Psychological Medicine, 37 (9)

[vii] Powell, J. (2006) *Internet Information Seeking in Mental Health: Population survey*. British Journal of Psychiatry. 273-277.