

# **BACP ANNUAL CONFERENCE** **TELFORD**

**FRIDAY 17<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2008: 14.50 – 15.50**

**GUEST LECTURE: SIAN MORGAN**

***EMDR: “Unlocking and unblocking the ties that bind us”***

***Notes to accompany lecture:***

Dr Francine Shapiro, psychologist and Senior Research Fellow at the Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto, USA discovered the powerful effect of eye movements in 1987. She then developed and researched a psychotherapeutic approach called EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing) which is now widely acknowledged as a highly effective treatment for PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder). In 2005 it was validated by NICE as a preferred treatment for PTSD. There are now over 4,000 EMDR trained therapists in the UK and Ireland, from a wide variety of theoretical backgrounds, integrating EMDR into their treatment of numerous presenting psychological problems.

While we still do not know exactly how EMDR works, we do know from memory and brain research that painful or traumatic experiences are stored in a different part of the brain than pleasant or neutral ones. We also know that, normally, if we are troubled by something, we think about it, talk about it, perhaps dream about it and eventually we are able to come to some sort of ‘adaptive resolution’. This means that we find a way to come to terms with it in a healthy way, enabling us to put it behind us. When we experience a trauma or an overwhelming event or are repeatedly subjected to distress, this healing process may become overloaded, leaving the original disturbing experience, or dysfunctionally stored material, unprocessed.

What researchers think is that EMDR in some way taps into our innate healing processes, perhaps by replicating the brain activity similar to that which takes place in REM sleep. By synthesising this through bi-lateral stimulation (either through eye movements, tapping or auditory cues) at the same time as focusing on the disturbing event, we allow the memory to neurologically reconnect with the body/mind and process the information at an accelerated speed, enabling the person to arrive at an adaptive resolution. The painful event or trauma becomes an unfortunate memory but no longer produces the emotional pain that it did before. In addition,

people spontaneously start to view themselves and the event in a healthier and more positive way.

For example someone who has been continually criticised by a parent may move from the belief 'I am not good enough' to 'I am successful' during the course of processing childhood events which they recall having a negative emotional impact on them. Or, someone who has suffered abuse may have been living with the belief 'I am responsible' and during the treatment move to a place where they not only rationally know but emotionally feel that they are not responsible for the actions of perpetrating adults.

The term that Shapiro uses to describe the natural process that EMDR treatment facilitates is 'Adaptive Information Processing'.

Traumatic memory and its treatment with EMDR has taught us much about memories that we might not view as 'traumatic' but nonetheless have had a detrimental impact on our present functioning. These are often early experiences in our family of origin or significant events which have contributed to how we see ourselves and the world and cause us difficulty in the present.

By targeting these 'touchstone' events we can begin to unlock these memories. We then go on to reprocess these memories using EMDR thereby 'unblocking' the circuitry that keeps triggering us back into unhelpful responses which we learned in the past. From the examples above this might mean always acting as if they weren't good enough or continually taking on the responsibility for others' actions.

It is important to understand that EMDR is not merely a technique using eye movements, or more accurately bi-lateral stimulation of the brain, but a method that utilizes a very precise protocol. This protocol integrates many of the successful elements of a range of therapeutic approaches and combines them with bi-lateral stimulation. This involves aspects of person-centred, cognitive, behavioural, psychodynamic, psychoanalytic and body therapies.

### Research

The evidence base for the efficacy of EMDR is also impressive. Since Shapiro (1989) published her seminal study on EMDR and PTSD there have been well over 100 case studies published on EMDR and 17 RCT's (randomised control studies) and 5 meta-analyses. This amounts to significantly more research into EMDR than for any other psychological or psychopharmacological approach to PTSD, and provides the strong basis on which evidence can be judged. For a full up to date bibliography of all research material see [www.trauma-pages.com](http://www.trauma-pages.com)

## **Training**

**Training in EMDR is open to experienced and accredited mental health practitioners. This includes BACP, UKCP, BABCP, BPS accredited therapist. Training is offered in the UK by three approved organisations details of which can be found on the EMDR UK & Ireland Association website [www.emdrassociation.org.uk](http://www.emdrassociation.org.uk) This site also provides information on conferences, accreditation and accredited EMDR Consultants and Practitioners in the UK and Ireland. If you wish to access an EMDR trained therapist in your area, you can contact the association for names of trained therapists.**

## **References**

1. Morgan Sian "EMDR comes of age" Therapy April 2006 Vol17 No3
2. Shapiro F. Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing: basic principles, protocols and procedures. New York: The Guilford Press; 1995
3. Shapiro F (ed) EMDR as an Integrative Psychotherapy Approach. American Psychological Association; 2002

Sian Morgan BA, Dip Couns is a counsellor and psychotherapist working in private practice in Brighton and Hove. She is trained in both humanistic and psychodynamic approaches and is currently studying for an MSc in Cognitive Psychotherapy. Sian is a senior accredited member of BACP and an Accredited EMDR Consultant and Facilitator. She co-facilitates with Sandi Richman, one of the few EMDR Approved Trainers in the UK, on EMDR training programmes. For information see [www.emdr-training.com](http://www.emdr-training.com)