



Michelle Ayres and Carol Vivyan receiving their British Journal of Nursing Mental Health Nurse of the Year Award 2015, presented at Shakespeare's Underglobe in March 2015

Prestigious award for Guernsey CBT therapists

This year Guernsey-based Michelle Ayres and Carol Vivyan were named by the British Journal of Nursing as Mental Health Nurses of the Year. CBT Today Associate Editor Patricia Murphy spoke with them about their innovative work on the island of Guernsey that brought them this award

Both Michelle and Carol - each with three decades of mental health work experience - are BABCP accredited CBT therapists with a background in mental health nursing.

This year they were named Mental Health Nurses of the Year by the *British Journal of Nursing* for their innovative work in mental health care and particularly their handbook, *The Decider*, which blends CBT and Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) techniques.

The Decider was developed in response to an identified need in

Guernsey's adult mental health services to provide treatment options for patients where impulsivity was assessed as being problematic.

As a fully comprehensive DBT service is expensive and impractical for the kinds of smaller service found in Guernsey to commission, in 2010 Michelle and Carol were tasked with developing a programme for clients who presented with impulse disorders.

Michelle explained its genesis further: 'Our thinking was shaped following feedback from an initial pilot group of clients who told us about their

experiences in mental health services including what they had found helpful and what had been less so. The evidence base for the project was informed by CBT and DBT; in particular, Beck, Ellis, Padesky, Young and Linehan.

'DBT is probably the best known empirically validated therapy for borderline personality disorder and we felt that the original intensive format, which can be difficult for services to provide, could be adapted. Other studies have found that DBT skills groups can be useful where full DBT is unavailable.



This desire to improve the psychological wellbeing of the young is timely. Child and adolescent services are in crisis. NHS spending has been cut and fallen in England by nearly £50m since 2010, while there has been a steep increase in self-harm and inpatient admissions

'By bringing aspects of these two evidence-based therapies together, we were able to introduce a new CBT and DBT informed Skills Group to our adult mental health service. Both therapy approaches recognise the value of developing effective life skills for complex presentations.'

The Decider consists of client handouts and a therapist manual which provides detailed explanations for the clinician on how to present each skill as part of a structured 12-session group. The client is able to utilise a reference card showing pictures each of which relate to each 'decider skill'. Clear pictorial images on the card summarise the 32 CBT and DBT skill sets.

Clinicians can adapt the skills to suit individuals or client groups. By drawing on their knowledge of the client, they are able to demonstrate and model skill sets to ensure that the manual is tailored to individual client needs.

There is regular training in Guernsey for all mental health staff and client groups are run twice a year. These are facilitated by mental health staff from different disciplines. Clients are also able to attend a monthly graduate group after completion.

Michelle and Carol also facilitate workshops in the UK, Ireland and Romania. In order to bring the skills training to life, there is a strong emphasis on therapist modelling and, having witnessed Carol and Michelle in action, I can testify that effective use of *The Decider* requires energy, action and conviction, and is presented in a fun and engaging way.

Presenting the skills as credible requires a willingness by the therapist to demonstrate alternative behaviours, and a sense of playfulness and good humour are essential requisites. It is unsurprising that following such a rigorous workout Michelle reports that many therapists testify to an increase in their own teaching confidence and clinical skills.

Whilst *The Decider* is being used extensively in adult mental health services in Guernsey, it has also been adapted for use by other service settings on the island. The potential to modify and adapt this teaching aid for children and young people has been recognised by the pair who have been spurred on by feedback from staff and patients routinely commenting, 'I wish I had been taught these skills when I was young!'

This desire to improve the psychological wellbeing of the young is timely. Child and adolescent services are in crisis. NHS spending has been cut and fallen in England by nearly £50m since 2010, while there has been a steep increase in self-harm and inpatient admissions.

The duo recognise that pre-emptive approaches to improving the psychological wellbeing of the young can help prevent emotional problems developing in later life. In response, they have developed a simplified version of *The Decider* for use in schools and youth groups for children aged 8 to 11 years.

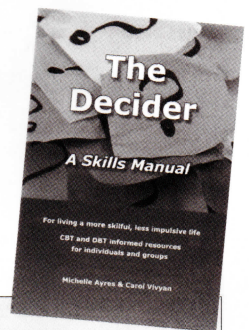
The pair have conducted a pilot study of their work with 50 clients and the findings have recently been submitted for publication. In addition

they are currently conducting a pilot study in a Guernsey girls' school and the local Les Nicolles Prison has introduced *The Decider* as part of their rehabilitation programme. It is also being used by staff from the Youth Commission and Children and Young People's Services.

Their decision to collaborate has clearly paid dividends, and the enthusiasm and passion demonstrated in their work is contagious. They have overcome a lack of resources, apathy and role constraints and have always kept the client at the centre of what they do.

Carol said: '*The Decider* has almost developed a life of its own. We encourage clinicians to be creative with our work and we get great feedback from them about their success and ideas.'

One of the key messages embedded in the life skills training reminds participants: 'If you always do what you always did you'll always get what you always got'. I doubt Michelle and Carol could ever be accused of that.



More information can be obtained at www.thedecider.org.uk