EMDR AS A THERAPY FOR COMPLICATED GRIEF – DOES IT HAVE A PLACE IN HOSPICES?

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Background Eye Movement Desensitisation Reprocessing (EMDR) was developed in the eighties as a natural process to successfully treat Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Sometimes the bereaved do not respond to regular counselling alone and continue to find it difficult to cope with living in the present. This is known as Complicated Grief or Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder. Painful emotions can be so long-lasting and severe that those affected have trouble recovering from the loss and resuming their normal life. EMDR can be successful in treating Complicated or Complex Grief. St Raphael’s Hospice employ two counsellors who are qualified to deliver EMDR therapy.

Aim To successfully utilise EMDR as a grief therapy for those experiencing Complicated Grief: recognising that for some, Complicated Grief is akin to PTSD.

Method St. Raphael’s Hospice actively recruited additional therapists to our Psychological Support Services Team in the wake of COVID-19. We were alerted to the high proportion (hitherto unmatched) of trauma related cases in the bereaved as the population emerged from the pre-trauma to the post-trauma stage. EMDR is offered to those who present with the following, disclosed via their regular bereavement counselling: Re-experiencing; Constant negative thoughts; Avoidance and emotional numbing; Hyperarousal.

Results We are in the first six months of offering EMDR and, to date, nine clients have received this therapy. Quantitative results are pending but qualitative feedback is positive. On average, two to three sessions of EMDR deliver positive results.

Conclusion Further analysis is required but early indications are that EMDR can be effective when a typical bereavement state isn’t achieved by regular counselling alone. EMDR in a hospice setting needs to be a short-term focused bereavement intervention. In depth history taking is essential because clients with an extensive trauma history might require a referral to a more specialist service.