

Obituary

Tribute to David Westbrook (1950–2013)

David Westbrook, who died tragically in a road traffic accident in April, was a stalwart of the CBT world. He was a man of substantial physical and psychological heft and has left an equally substantial hole. He is missed by an extraordinarily range of people, as messages on the Oxford Cognitive Therapy Centre (OCTC) website from people whose lives he touched attest.

David gained a degree in Psychology and Philosophy at Oxford University in 1972. He registered as a mental health nurse (and gold medal award winner) in 1979, and rose to become charge nurse on a specialist behaviour therapy unit led by Vic Meyer. This is where his interest in (C)BT, especially as a treatment for OCD, began. A return to psychology followed, and he completed the British Psychological Society Clinical Psychology Diploma with distinction in Oxford in 1985. Oxford was already well furnished with CBT therapists, both in the university and in the NHS, and Dave took full advantage of training and supervision available. In the early 1990s, he was a founder member of OCTC, and in 2004 he followed Joan Kirk as Director, retiring from the post in 2012. He proved a more than able leader – good at management, at organizational structure, at finance, and at fostering cohesion in a geographically dispersed team, especially through the generous hospitality he and his wife (Martina Mueller) offered in their own home. He strengthened the position of OCTC within the Mental Health Trust, and under his leadership its international reputation as a centre of excellence in CBT training and dissemination grew.

However Dave was more than a manager; he was a true scientist practitioner. He had the scientist's curiosity and respect for theory and research (data, evidence), and he could translate the science into sound and compassionate clinical work with individual patients, and communicate it clearly to all sorts of people. He also conducted research himself, not in a well-resourced academic department but in the world of the practising clinician. His research portfolio spanned more than 20 years, and includes investigations of OCD, patient perceptions of different waiting list procedures, long term outcome for adults receiving CBT in routine clinical practice, the impact of CBT training both face-to-face and online, and more. He also, with colleagues, wrote and edited best-selling practical CBT texts, notably *The Oxford Guide to Behavioural Experiments in Cognitive Therapy* (2006), *The Oxford Guide to Surviving as a CBT Therapist* (2010), and *An Introduction to Cognitive Behaviour Therapy: skills and applications* (2nd ed., 2011).

Dave was one of a team who, together, developed the Oxford Diploma/MSc in Advanced Cognitive Therapy Studies. His special task was to lead the research methods module, not a topic always greeted with joyful anticipation by students. Yet the feedback was consistent: "I thought this would be dry and boring, and Dave brought it alive". He trained people from all sorts of professional backgrounds, and at all stages of development as CBT therapists, in the UK and elsewhere. At the time of his death he was booked to train in Sweden, Kosovo, Malta (for Libyan clinicians), Slovenia, Iceland, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Thailand and Japan. Those he

trained remember the high quality learning he offered them, and above all they remember him as warm, approachable and always willing to help.

As a clinician, Dave's understanding and skill were profound, as I know from having been his supervisor between 1999 and 2012. His special interests were in OCD and chronic depression. His patients' difficulties were often severe, complex and deeply entrenched. I was struck by how he used our sessions as a genuine reflective space, approaching sessions with a characteristically open mind, ready to rethink and try new angles, and always anchored by his sense of theory and evidence. He did this challenging work with unfailing patience, compassion, respect and warmth. His patients must have felt very safe in his kind, steady hands.

Dave was a man of integrity, honest, hard-working, conscientious, supportive, utterly reliable. He is greatly missed, by his colleagues, his friends and above all his much loved and loving family.

Melanie Fennell