

# The impact of training Occupational Therapy staff to implement Behavioural Activation for Depression

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## Introduction:

The COBRA study (Richards et al, 2016) demonstrated that the provision of a simpler therapy, Behavioural Activation (BA), was as effective and cheaper than Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) in meeting the needs of people with depression. Working as part of the Scottish Government’s Mental Health Strategy to increase access to psychological therapies and interventions, NHS Education for Scotland (NES) trained a group of Scottish experts to provide training in Behavioural Activation for Depression (Martell, Dimidjian & Herman-Dunn 2010) within the NHS boards.



## Aim:

This innovative project supports the 2020 vision through the provision of a simpler and less costly evidence-based therapy for people with depression. It also draws on the expertise of Occupational Therapists who have holistic skills and experience in meeting the needs of people with mental health problems but are often confined to working within secondary care mental health services. The project aims to: 1) widen access to evidence based psychological interventions for people with depression in local community settings, and 2) improve the mood of people with depression, as evidenced by use of standardised clinical outcome measures.

## Methods:

NES provided training and support to a group of BA Trainers who subsequently provided training to mental health occupational therapy staff working within NHS Lanarkshire. The occupational therapy staff implemented Behavioural Activation for Depression by providing regular Behavioural Activation groups (Curran & Houghton, 2008) within local community settings. Within NHS Lanarkshire, 19 BA groups were delivered across all 10 localities, between January 2016 and December 2018. The Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ), Clinical Outcome Rating Scale (CORE) and the Behavioural Activation for Depression Scale (BADS) were used to monitor the clinical outcomes for people with depression. The PHQ was carried out on a pre and post group basis; this is a self administered questionnaire used to monitor the severity of depression and the response to treatment. The CORE was also carried out pre and post group and is a self reported questionnaire designed to indicate the level of psychological distress from healthy to severe using a 5-point rating scale. The BADS was used pre, post and during each weekly session of the group. This is a self-administered questionnaire which is designed to measure changes in avoidance and activation over the course of BA delivery.



## Outcomes/results:

NHS Education for Scotland has trained 99 BA Trainers as part of a national programme to implement Behavioural Activation for depression across Scotland. Within Lanarkshire Health Board, 4 BA Trainers then delivered a programme of local board training in Behavioural Activation between 2013 – 15 to Occupational Therapists working in mental health services. The Occupational Therapists now provide a group programme of Behavioural Activation for depression within community settings. Between 2016 – 18, 19 BA groups were provided to 133 people with depression, some co-morbid with substance misuse. A complete dataset is available on 84 people with depression who completed group attendance. There was a significant difference in the pre and post CORE, PHQ & BADS scores:

	Pre		Post		Difference		
	<i>m</i>	<i>s.d</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>s.d</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
CORE-OM total score	79	20	61	24	7	70	0.000
PHQ	18	7	11	7	8	83	0.000
BADS	45	25	60	37	-3	82	0.001

The results demonstrate that there was a significant reduction in the severity of the depression and level of psychological distress experienced by people. They were less likely to avoid activity and were more active at the end of the group.

## Conclusions:

The results demonstrate that people with depression attending the BA groups provided by the OTs within community settings improved their mood, reduced their levels of avoidance and increased their activity levels. The level of access to psychological therapies was increased for people attending mental health and addiction services across Lanarkshire. The results also demonstrate that occupational therapists are excellently placed to deliver psychological interventions. Occupational therapists’ core skills link well with the skills required to facilitate BA groups and the core theory underpinning BA - graded behavioural change through engaging in meaningful activity - is a fundamental aspect of OT practice within mental health.

## References:

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