

# CLAHRC BITE

## How is Positive Psychotherapy applied in mental health care? August 2016

CLAHRC researchers investigate how this innovative and increasingly popular form of therapy is applied in real-world settings

**Positive Psychotherapy (PPT) offers an alternative approach to tackling mental illness and distress. This study is the first to systematically explore how PPT is applied in clinically relevant populations.**

Positive Psychotherapy (PPT) is an increasingly popular psychology intervention. PPT offers an alternative focus to traditional psychotherapy which has tended to concentrate on alleviating suffering and distress, rather than emphasising what makes life most “worth living” by developing engagement, pleasure, and meaning.

### Fig 1. PPT focuses on treating depression by

- Promoting engagement (involvement in daily life)
- Meaning (belonging to and serving something greater than the self)
- Pleasure (positive emotions)



**CLAHRC researchers explored the application of PPT and highlighted gaps in knowledge that may prevent its wider clinical use**

### Fig 2. Typical components of PPT

- Keeping a “blessings journal” - of positive things that have happened
- Gratitude letters - to someone never properly thanked
- Compiling a “family tree” of strengths - recognizing the signature strengths of family members
- Satisficing - settling on a goal or outcome that is “good enough” rather than aiming for a maximised outcome, or perfection

## Summary

### What was the aim of this research?

The aim was to explore published research to identify how Positive Psychotherapy is applied in mental health care, including how the model is altered when used in practice.

### What were the methods?

Researchers systematically reviewed academic papers to investigate how, and how widely, components of PPT are applied.

### What were the results?

Papers describing completed research studies widely applied some PPT components (e.g. blessings journal, character strengths) and scarcely applied others (e.g. satisficing plan or family strengths tree). Most evidence papers poorly described the intervention and clinical reasons for applying components of PPT.

### Conclusions

Given the lack of rationale for applying PPT, further inquiry is needed to establish which components are acceptable and feasible for use in different patient groups and settings.

Positive Psychotherapy is recommended as a flexible model that can be applied to other patient groups alongside other treatments approaches. However, it remains unclear which of the many components (see Fig. 2) are applied.

CLAHRC researchers examined the evidence of how the PPT model is applied in practice and drew conclusions on what further evidence might be required before the therapy can be used more widely.

### Is there enough evidence for PPT to be extended in clinical practice?

Further enquiry is needed to establish which PPT components are acceptable and feasible across different diagnostic groups and different methods of delivery.

Once the appropriateness of the model is established, and there is a clear model of processes or mechanisms of change, rigorous, high quality efficacy trials can definitively establish whether or not PPT is effective and can enhance mental health care.



### What are the implications for.....Research?

The main implication for research is that PPT processes and outcomes need to be mapped. In addition research must explore how the application of PPT may differ between people and settings and whether some parts of PPT are more acceptable for some people.

Any additional research is likely to involve in-depth interviews with patients of varying clinical profiles, in different settings. Only once an appropriate and acceptable PPT model is established, can it be rigorously tested.

Establishing a satisfactory model will help ensure good adherence during a clinical trial of PPT, so that rigorous, high quality evidence on effectiveness can be collected.

### What are the implications for...Practice?

The main implication for practice is that PPT can be modified for a range of patients, treatment methods and alongside other interventions. However, we cannot be certain how clinically useful PPT is without further evidence.

### Read the full paper

*The Application of Positive Psychotherapy in Mental Health Care: A Systematic Review*

Sophie Walsh, Megan Cassidy, and Stefan Priebe

Journal of Clinical Psychology doi: 10.1002/jclp.22368

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/jclp.22368/abstract>



### More about this project

CLAHRC PhD Sophie Walsh's research project is developing a mobile health intervention using positive psychology for common mental health conditions:

<http://www.clahrc-norththames.nihr.ac.uk/sophie-walsh/>

The findings of this review, alongside qualitative interviews and work with a user panel have been synthesised to design the content of a self-help website for people with depression:

[www.uplift.elft.nhs.uk](http://www.uplift.elft.nhs.uk)



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