Intolerance of Uncertainty in Generalised Anxiety Disorder and beyond

This workshop will focus on understanding IU and considering its implications for treatment, both within the treatment of GAD but also more broadly, especially with comorbid anxiety disorders. Based on recent theoretical developments, the workshop will draw on experiences from our first studies of a single strand treatment for IU. We will consider the rationale for focusing on IU, behaviours associated with IU, behavioural experiments about IU, and how IU may manifest within the therapy process, including the therapeutic relationship.

Learning objectives:
- Extend knowledge and clinical skill of addressing Intolerance of Uncertainty (IU) in GAD and other disorders
- To identify and understand the clinical features of IU
- To critically examine recent theoretical developments in understanding IU and its role in psychopathology
- To enhance skills in engaging clients to work on IU and planning and implementing strategies to reduce IU

Training methods:
Methods may include didactic presentation of key notions, experiential exercises, application of key ideas to specific clinical situations, practical exercise, working in pairs/small groups, role play, and plenary question and answer sessions.
About the presenter:
My main research interests since 1989 have been in the field of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and Generalised Anxiety Disorder and other disorders dominated by intrusive thoughts, worry and rumination. Although we first became interested in role of Intolerance of Uncertainty in the early nineties, for the last decade along with colleagues and students at Newcastle we have been actively researching its possible origins and developmental course, its potential contribution to anxiety, depression, psychosis, and autism spectrum disorders; its possible role in physical health conditions, its presentation and role in non-western cultures, its implications for healthy ageing, its impact on caregiving, and now IU-specific treatment strategies, etc. divide my time between Newcastle University and the NHS. I teach research methods in clinical psychology, with a particular interest in “smallish-N” designs in clinical and provide research supervision who are the major contributors to my research. I have published over 130 scientific articles, several book chapters and two books; one for therapists and one a self-help book. My role in the NHS is around training and service developments in the areas of understanding and addressing complexity, decision making, and scaffolding.

Background and Reading:
I was part of the team at Laval University which first proposed Intolerance of Uncertainty (IU) as a key feature in the development and maintenance of Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD). We developed a measure, the Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale (Freeston et al., 1994), a model (Dugas et al, 1998), and a treatment (see Dugas & Robichaud, 2007; Meares & Freeston, 2013; 2015; Wilkinson, Meares & Freeston, 2013) which has received empirical support through a series of RCTs and other designs among adults, adolescents, and older adults. Although originally proposed as a feature specific to GAD, it has since become clear that IU is an important transdiagnostic across the anxiety disorders, OCD spectrum disorders, eating disorders, psychosis, etc. It also been shown to be involved in the anxiety experienced by people with ASD and is finding applications in understanding the distress and disability associated with physical health problems. However, it remains central to GAD which can perhaps be considered as the condition where IU finds its strongest or clearest expression.

As well as attracting attention from clinicians working with diverse populations, IU has been addressed in the Uncertainty Model of Anxiety, a model that attempts an integrated psychological and neurobiological account (Grupe & Nitschke, 2013). Further, a recent evolutionary-theoretical account of stress and anxiety suggests that intolerance of uncertainty is the default setting for humans (Brosschot, Verkuil, & Thayer, 2016). From a psychological standpoint, Carleton (2012, 2016a, 2016b) suggests that IU has key role in anxiety and differs in important ways from other known factors (known collectively as the Fundamental Fears) such as fear of negative evaluation and anxiety sensitivity. This work and
indeed our own research over recent years would suggest that threat and intolerance of uncertainty are separable and operate together in anxiety.


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Cost of 1-day workshop:

£130 including CPD certificate and catering

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