

SWP 47/90 PHYSICAL THERAPY AND MANAGEMENT CONSULTING

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SUMMARY: Relaxation techniques have been taught to antenatal patients for many years. This paper concerns the application of those techniques as a contribution to the management of executive stress. It describes the development, in New Zealand, of stress management programmes with relaxation techniques and other insights from physiotherapy as major components. The programmes have been successfully offered for a wide range of management participants in differing environments.

The experience of the authors with their work over a period of five years suggests that there is a large undeveloped opportunity for physiotherapists to make a valuable and distinctive contribution in this field of management consulting- provided the necessary changes in attitudes of practitioners can be achieved.

INTRODUCTION

Stress is the executive disease of the late 20th century. During the 1970's and 80's "stress " has entered everyday vocabulary of the manager. The economic restructuring in Britain and New Zealand has added the pressure to survive to most corporate and individual executive agendas. An inevitable consequence seemed to be ever increasing demands upon executives. Greater performance demands lead to increased activity causing disturbance to the personal, family and professional life. Short term disturbances change cause anxiety and stress. When change and disturbance becomes the rule rather than the exception the consequences can be severe for individuals, their families and their employing organisations.

A large literature has arisen concerning stress and particular occupations. *McLean (1979), Cooper and Marshall (1980), Marshall and Cooper (1981), BIM (1985), Cranwell Ward (1987), Coleman (1988) and Markides and Cooper (1989)* are just a tiny sample of the writing in this area. Professor Cary Cooper perhaps the best known writer in this area in Britain due to his broadcast appearances and the use of

work in newspapers and popular magazines. In addition to the literature, a stress management industry has grown up in most parts of the developed world.

Stress management programmes have gained in number and popularity. They form a major part of many management consulting practices and for some consultants in sole practice can constitute a full time activity.

Most programmes approach the subject from the point of view of psychology and management techniques. Some practitioners who are themselves Chartered Psychologists clearly believe that theirs is the only useful way in which to approach stress management.

The recent work in identifying the relationship between personality and predisposition and reaction to stress has been a major increase in our understanding. The recognition of the predisposition that "Type A" personality people have has allowed many to adapt and change their life styles to reduce stress. However since personality is very difficult if not impossible to change in practice, the identification of personality types is insufficient response to a growing problem.

The psychological route subsequently followed depends on the background of the psychologist. Behaviourists may provide behaviour modification programmes to change the unhelpful behaviour patterns that give rise to stress. Often these are accompanied by techniques to help with time management and personal organisation. Psychotherapists will naturally emphasise psychotherapeutic routes to the individual ownership of the problems, the raising of self esteem and better coping. Another route is concerned with the motivational drive and self achievement through believing in success and setting objectives that require an individual to become more productive and leave the stress area behind.

While some programmes make passing reference to relaxation and other aspects of physical therapy, it is generally an afterthought or an aside from the main theme. However Physiotherapists have a distinctive major contribution to make to stress management programmes through the teaching of relaxation techniques.

The contribution made by physiotherapists through the teaching of relaxation skills in the antenatal area is well accepted. The development of programmes using those and other physiotherapy skills for managers and others under stress at work in New Zealand suggests that physiotherapists are neglecting an opportunity. It is an opportunity to make contributions which can be described as treatment, as an aid to client self-diagnosis and most importantly as preventative medicine.

DISCOVERING THE NEEDS

The discovery of the role a physiotherapist could play in stress management programmes for executives was a gradual process. In 1983 the authors emigrated to New Zealand. Because family commitments (including a new baby) precluded a full time job, the only physiotherapy opportunity was the teaching of ante-natal classes in the evenings. The classes involved husbands as far as possible in every aspect of the programme including the relaxation exercises. The teaching of relaxation techniques led to repeated suggestions that the techniques would be helpful to managers in stressful occupations.

A number of opportunities to test the utility of the techniques for managers arose over a period of 5 years.

The first opportunity was during the designing of a range of public self-development workshops for executives. A short session was included in the 3 day programme as an experiment. The workshop contained a number of components designed to allow individuals to assess their effectiveness as executives. It offered a number of techniques to develop skills that are at present undeveloped in many individuals. The response to the relaxation sessions was very positive. Sixteen subsequent programmes have contained two longer sessions, with time for practice in between. The current content of the programme shown in Fig 1 sets the sessions in context. In order to accommodate the stress management component the programme was lengthened and is currently four days long.

Fig 1
about here

A second opportunity arose when an executive from a local authority attended antenatal classes with his wife. At the same time the Chief Executive of the authority attended one of the early self development workshops described above. Shortly afterwards a major local government reorganisation was announced which involved merging 5 territorial authorities. The Chief Executive of the authority asked for the senior team to be taught stress reduction techniques through relaxation.

The course was run over a number of weeks in the evenings and included exercises to identify stress; its nature (both negative and positive); personal assessment of stressors as well as relaxation. Discussion of

physiological issues related to the experience of stress became a feature of the programme. The workshops proved so popular that it was extended down the organisation to include supervisors.

Shortly after this programme, the consulting partnership became involved in an annual Interpersonal Skills workshop for the Meat Industry Employers Association. Managers in meat processing plants (who kill and dismember and freeze 60 million sheep every year in very harsh conditions) represent a quite different group to local authority managers. They tend to have risen to the top from manual positions on the "slaughter board" or "killing chain". It is an industry fraught with industrial unrest and believed by many to be uniquely difficult to work in.

Two sessions were included in the week long workshop. The same content was included as for the local authority. The overall workshop was similar to the public workshop described earlier. The sessions received very high ratings and led to enquiries about more sessions at plant level. The belief that the activity was useful to many different types of people grew.

Otago University Business School asked for relaxation techniques and stress management advice to be provided to managers undertaking the MBA- (Master of Business Administration). Arguably the most arduous programme at the university, with immense amounts of work over 15 months, the MBA attracts the most gifted of managers. From the student evaluations of the total programme it was clear that the Stress Management and relaxation sessions were some of the most valuable in the eyes of the students.

The New Zealand Institute of Management now sponsor regular whole day stress management and personal effectiveness workshops run by the authors. They also include two sessions at their annual national Management Development Programme.

Government departments and private sector companies are also regular customers for in house programmes.

Clearly the market for the provision of stress management skills using relaxation techniques is far more extensive than most practitioners have thought to be the case.

DEVELOPING THE CONTENT

The development of the role of a physiotherapist in management training and consulting has been a gradual one. It has gone hand in hand with the development and testing of material and content

appropriate to the world of work. It has required a new way of thinking for the physiotherapist and has involved the move from treatment to self-diagnosis and preventative activity.

A Paradigm Shift

Most physiotherapists require a major paradigm shift to relate to the new environment.

The client population are not patients in the sense of having a medical need for a caring medical professional, on whom they feel dependent, to meet. To move from *modus operandi* to one of spending time with apparently successful and often affluent managers for consulting fees requires takes a change in attitude. Despite initial appearances, the needs of managers may be very severe. Addressing their stress issues may be seen as preventative medicine, mirroring today's concern for health promotion.

The whole concept of management development is one of "we" and "us. It is not one of "I" and "you". Invariably the concept of dependence is missing and the relationship is between equals.

Physiotherapists do have an advantage in one sense in that the medical and paramedical sector still has a residual trust and acceptance of impartial integrity and independence which is a major bonus in approaching the management training area. It is only a plus if it is clear that the physiotherapist understands the commercial world. The language, experience and imperatives of the world of work must be understood in order to relate the physiotherapy concepts to the clients. It is also necessary to be at ease with their values.

Many (but not all) would claim that antenatal classes are best given by physiotherapists who are mothers. Many management educators would similarly claim that management education is best carried out by those who have been managers in a private sector competitive enterprise. Obviously not very many physiotherapists have been private sector managers.

The transition in this case was helped by being married to a successful private sector executive. The stress, the orientation, language and values were well known - through a husband who had in the past reached the second stage of burnout and had all the signs of workaholic stress. First hand knowledge of constant tiredness, sickness through tension release on holiday and so on are remembered if they have intruded into your own private life.

From Treatment to Self-Diagnosis and Prevention

Initially the teaching was very similar to an antenatal class content. Emphasis was placed on posture, the teaching and practice of breathing techniques and Jacobson style muscle relaxation. Some limited principles from ergonomics were also included.

The main thrust was to help individuals cope with the stress that they experienced. Relaxation was seen as a way of encouraging sleep so that the stress cycle could be broken. Change or disturbances often require extra work and bring with them stress and anxiety. They in turn can lead to difficulty in relaxing and sleeping; tiredness reduces effectiveness which leads the individual working even harder and suffering even more stress and the cycle repeats itself-becoming more severe with each complete cycle. The treatment was essentially palliative (Fig 2).

Fig 2

about here

It became clear that individuals only became committed to action to reduce stress if they believed they suffered from it. There was a need for instruments which allowed people to assess their own stress. The best known of these was developed by Holmes and Rahe at Washington School of Medicine. (*Holmes and Rahe (1967)*) It is a self rating checklist of life events. From experimental work values have been computed for each event. Individuals are able to review the last 2 years of their lives and calculate the extent of their stress exposure. This scale has formed the basis for the development of a questionnaire used in the programmes. Part of the adapted instrument is in Fig 3.

Fig 3

about here

A number of other discussion and self rating devices have been developed to encourage individuals to recognise and understand their own stress induced behaviour. In facilitating discussion a background in physiotherapy is very helpful. It allows physiological explanations to be given concerning the physical signs

of stress. Discussion of the reasons for increase in heart rate, perspiration, paleness, cold extremities etc, is seen as very helpful by participants. In particular the explanations are well received when the relaxation techniques are experienced having an effect upon an individual when they are practiced.

These approaches allow a measure of self diagnosis and are step away from dependence upon expert diagnosis and treatment. The final move has been to include preventative issues.

It is well established that particular types of people are predisposed to stress. In later seminars and one day workshops extensive use has been made of the Beech stress inventory. (*Beech 1985*)

The 53 questions allow the consultant to provide feedback and counselling concerning four factors and their interaction. The factors are : *Personality type* (with particular reference to Type A characteristics); *Neuroticism* (defined as being unduly sensitive or touchy and being prey to swings of mood or feeling); *Current Stresses* and *Personal Coping Ability*. Individuals are asked to complete the questionnaire and send it to the course tutors prior to the workshop or course.

The use of a Psychological profile underlines the multi-disciplinary approach that is followed in this work. In addition to physiotherapy and psychology, a number of preventative and coping strategies from management science are now part of the programmes.

The more recent one whole day or two half days seminars have had approximately 25% of the time devoted to techniques of priority setting, stating and choosing between goals, delegation and the use of time as a resource. This part of the programme is handled by the management consultant partner in the consulting business. Fig 4 gives an idea of the content of a typical one day programme.

Fig 4

about here

CONCLUSIONS

Management Development is increasingly holistic in its orientation with a concern for mind, body and spirit. It is also increasingly holistic in terms of seeking to address managers whole life space. Few would regard job training as an entirely intellectual activity confined to the working day. Techniques of life planning; corporate medical and health and fitness initiatives are increasingly common.

The initiatives described here have been welcomed in the fiercely competitive management education market. They represent a growing realisation that physiotherapy has a place in contributing to the treatment of one of the main afflictions in a turbulent and stressful world.

It is an area where it is possible to make a considerable preventative medical impact upon individuals who may otherwise end up with major organic problems, the aftermath of which may require a large investment in physiotherapy time.

The authors would welcome contact with colleagues developing similar work

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Fig 1 Self Development Workshop

PROGRAMME

The programme will include the following topics. The amount of time on each will vary from workshop to workshop, with the needs of participants:

- Registration/Introduction
- Key Qualities of Successful Managers
- Self Assessment

PERSONAL SKILLS:

- Self Awareness and Awareness of Others
- Keeping up with Professional Knowledge
- Personal Organisation and Productivity
- Personal Time Management and Planning
- Stress Management and Relaxation
- Proactivity and Creativity
- Problem Solving and Decision Making

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS:

- Non-Verbal Communication
- Transactional Analysis
- Listening Skills
- Influential Communication
- Influencing Behaviour at Work

GROUP SKILLS:

- Understanding Groups
- Groups and Decisions
- Formal Presentation Skills
 - Theory
 - Video Practice
 - Evaluation

SELF DEVELOPMENT:

- Keeping up Professionally
- Preparing a Personal Development Plan
- Setting Targets
- Career and Life Goals

The programme commences 2 p.m. Monday and concludes 12 noon Friday. This allows time for flights in and out of Dunedin.

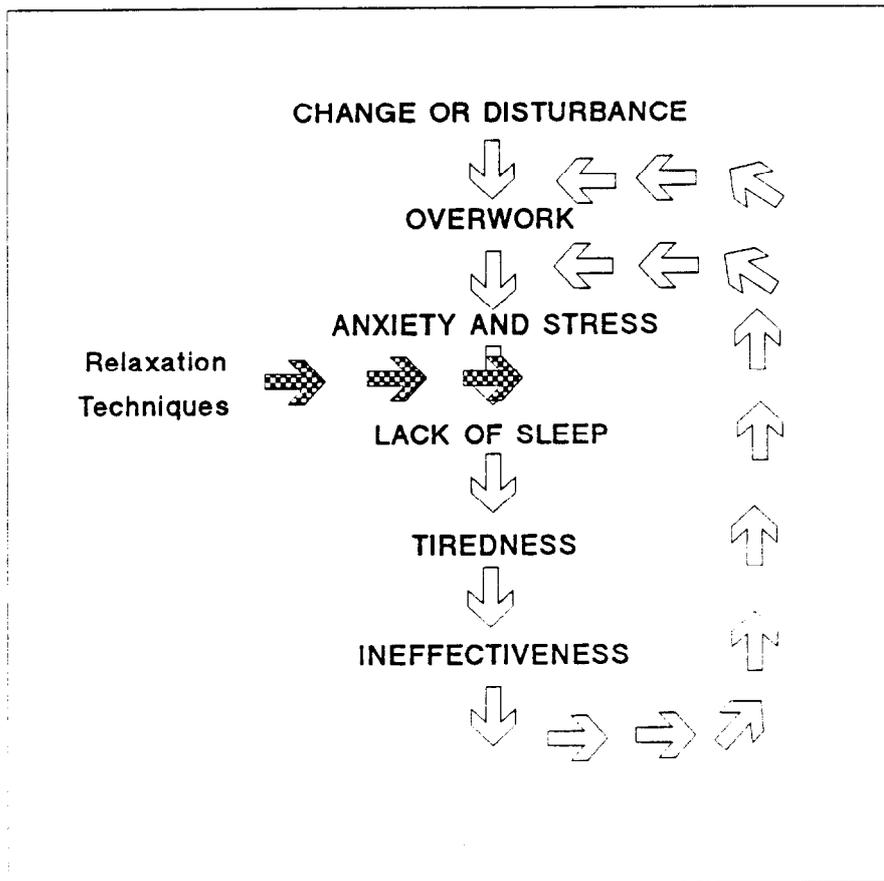


Fig 2

The Stress Cycle can be broken by Relaxation Techniques

Fig 3
SRESS LEVEL - LIFE EVENTS

Life Event	Value	Tick	Your Score
Death of a spouse	100	()	_____
Divorce	73	()	_____
Marital separation	65	()	_____
Jail Term	63	()	_____
Death of close family member	63	()	_____
Personal injury or illness	50	()	_____
Fired or made redundant	47	()	_____
Marital reconciliation	45	()	_____
Retirement	45	()	_____
Other Items			
Change in church activities	19	()	_____
Change in social activities	18	()	_____
Loan/Mortgage less than one year's net salary	17	()	_____
Change in sleeping habits	16	()	_____
Change in number of family get-togethers	15	()	_____
Change in eating habits	15	()	_____
Vacation	13	()	_____
Christmas	12	()	_____
Minor law violations	11	()	_____

Adapted from Holmes and Rahe (1967).

Fig 4
A One Day Stress Management and Personal Effectiveness Workshop

Prior to the Workshop:	Pre-reading Completion of Beech Stress Inventory
During the Workshop	The Nature of Stress Positive aspects Negative aspects Recognising Stress : In oneself and in others:- <i>The Rahe scale</i> <i>Life expectancy scale</i> <i>Results of "Beech"</i> <i>Burnout questionnaire</i> Coping Strategies Avoidance Relaxation Techniques (1) Personal Organisation <i>Prioritisation</i> <i>Choosing between Goals</i> <i>Effective Goal Setting</i> <i>Use of Time</i> <i>Delegation</i> Personal Counselling and Results Relaxation Techniques (2)
After the Workshop	Reinforcement Session.