

On Track



Education & Support
Cognitive Behavioural Groups

Fall & Winter 2008

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and more ...

On Track

A publication of

ADAM

Anxiety Disorders
Association of Manitoba

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FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A moment of your time!

Non-profit organizations depend on a supportive structure of people to make them viable. We at ADAM rely on a variety of folks in order to provide the services we offer. Many of these individuals are people like you. Perhaps you have benefitted from the direct use of our services. Perhaps you have referred a family member, friend, or client to us. Perhaps you are simply a concerned and caring community member who along with us seeks to provide resources for persons struggling with anxiety. Whatever your connection to us might be, we appreciate your support.



At present, we at ADAM have a need for individuals to come and serve on our Board of Directors. We are looking for a wide variety of people. Personal experience in overcoming an anxiety disorder is a plus, but it is not necessary. We are seeking both professional and non-professional persons who may (or may not) have a background in law or accounting. Previous board experience as well as familiarity with fundraising and grant application writing is an asset. The greatest quality however, is a passion for providing education, support, and intervention for those who struggle with anxiety disorders.

If you can spare the little time it takes to come to meetings that occur less than once a month - then your input and foresight are needed to ensure a stable organization continues to advance in the fight to help people with Anxiety Disorders.

Please contact ADAM at 925-0600 or e mail: adam@adam.mb.ca

Thank You

Bruce Sielski—Executive Director ADAM

*"You don't get to
choose how you're
going to die,
or when.*

*You can only
decide how you're
going to live now."*

Folk Musician - Joan Baez.

ADAM Ongoing Support Group

Location: 100 - 4 Fort Street
Time: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.
Every Monday Night

*Enter at 4 Fort Street
(corner of Fort and Assiniboine)

This is a drop in support group for anyone who has completed a cognitive behaviour program either through ADAM, St. Boniface Hospital Anxiety Disorders Clinic or other facilities. There will be a topic each evening followed by an opportunity for sharing information and experiences. There is no charge.

For more information, call 925-0600.

HEALTH ANXIETY

By Patricia Furer, Ph.D., C. Psych.

Most people have felt anxious about their health or the health of loved ones at some point in their lives. In fact, we are often faced with health situations in which it is entirely appropriate to feel some anxiety. For example, you may be waiting for the results of a biopsy, or your friend may have just been diagnosed with a serious illness. It is natural to feel anxious and upset in these situations. Similarly, most of us worry about death and dying from time to time. Experiencing anxiety about illness and death is normal. Worries about health and dying can be a problem, however, if they get in the way of living and enjoying life.

Health anxiety involves fears of having or getting a serious disease such as cancer, heart disease, or multiple sclerosis. Health anxiety is often associated with high levels of worry, substantial focus on bodily symptoms, repeated checking for signs and symptoms related to health concerns, focus on death and dying, and frequent efforts to obtain reassurance from family members, friends, or health care professionals. Some people with health anxiety avoid going to doctors because of fears of being diagnosed with a serious disease or because of dissatisfaction with previous health care experiences.

Worries about health may be triggered by experiences such as everyday symptoms (a skipped heartbeat, a headache), a scary experience such as finding a breast lump, or coping with illness or death of a loved one. Anxiety may also be triggered by stories about health issues in the community or media. Worries may be mild and transient or they may have a more severe and chronic course, waxing and waning over time. Some individuals may worry about a specific illness or body symptom, while others worry about many. Health anxiety can occur on its own or it may be part of other problems such as panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and depression.

People who have diagnosed medical conditions may also experience high levels of anxiety as a reaction to their health problems. In some circumstances, this may also be considered to be health anxiety.

Below are descriptions of various experiences with health anxiety.

Margot, 45 years old, was referred for treatment of panic disorder. In describing recent panic attacks, she reported that episodes started when she noticed a bodily symptom that triggered health concerns. As she thought about the symptoms, the anxiety escalated and she would have a

panic attack. When she noticed a bruise on her arm, she worried about leukemia; a tingling in her foot set off worries about multiple sclerosis; and painful joints triggered fears about arthritis. She frequently saw her physician for tests to rule out threatening diagnoses. She worried almost every day about her health. Her father died at age 61 after several years of difficult cancer treatment (she was 27). This situation was especially interesting because Margot was a respected health care provider in the community, showing that medical knowledge may not protect against health anxiety.

Pauline is a 63-year-old homemaker. She describes a life-long history of worries about her health. Her anxiety levels wax and wane, depending on the physical symptoms she experiences. She has had a number of extended periods when she felt healthy, had few physical symptoms, and was not worried about illness. In recent years, however, she has been very worried about having stomach or bowel cancer. She experiences many abdominal symptoms including bloating, heartburn, nausea, constipation, diarrhea, and pain. She has these

symptoms on a daily basis and each time she ends up feeling very anxious about her health. She worries that the doctors have missed early signs of cancer or that the cancer has appeared since her last check-up. Pauline also reports worries about other illnesses. For example, when she experiences bad headaches she worries about brain tumors and aneurysms. A rash on her leg prompts fears of skin cancer. Pauline maintains an active lifestyle and tries to eat a healthy diet. She says that her husband is getting tired of hearing about her worries and is always telling her to "just stop thinking about it".

Anthony is a 33-year-old teacher. He has had problems with chest pain for the last five years. After he first discussed

this with his family physician four years ago, Anthony was sent to a cardiologist and was given a full cardiac work-up. All test results came back negative. Despite the reassurance from several physicians and from the tests, Anthony worries about heart disease whenever the chest pain hits. He finds himself constantly worrying about his physical symptoms and is concerned that his problem has been misdiagnosed because he has not described his symptoms properly to the doctors. Anthony never discusses his fears about his health with friends or family for fear of being told of other people who have been misdiagnosed or died of heart attacks. When he hears stories about heart disease on the news, he always turns off the program immediately. He avoids reading the obituaries in the newspaper so he will not read about

Health anxiety is often associated with high levels of worry, substantial focus on bodily symptoms, ... focus on death and dying, and frequent efforts to obtain reassurance ...

HEALTH ANXIETY (continued)

anyone dying of a heart attack. Anthony is exercising less although he is very aware that exercise is very important for heart health. He fears that he will be like the ultra-healthy marathon runner who dies unexpectedly from undiagnosed heart disease.

Health concerns and worries are common in the general population. According to one European survey of over 2000 people:

- ◆30% worry a lot about their health
- ◆over 10% are afraid they have a serious disease
- ◆21% say that if a disease is brought to their attention (through the radio, TV, newspaper, or someone they know), they worry about getting it themselves
- ◆16% say it is hard to believe the doctor when s/he says that there is nothing to worry about.

The primary psychological treatment that has been shown to be helpful for health anxiety is cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). CBT for this type of problem involves:

- (a) **decreasing specific behaviours** such as checking one's body for symptoms and asking others for reassurance about one's health;
- (b) **learning how to counter the excessive worries** about health and illness;
- (c) **direct exposure to the illness worries**, which can reduce the fear associated with these thoughts;

(d) **overcoming avoidance** of situations related to illness and death;

(e) **coping with fear of death** by emphasizing the importance of accepting the reality of death and enjoying life to the fullest; and

(f) **practicing general anxiety management strategies** such as relaxation techniques and increasing exercise.

Research shows that CBT is helpful in reducing health anxiety. Studies show that individuals receiving from 6 to 20 sessions of CBT generally report decreased worries about illness, less focus on bodily symptoms, and a reduction in accompanying depression. Both individual and group CBT are effective. More evaluation of this treatment for health anxiety is needed and is presently ongoing in a number of centres around the world (including here in Winnipeg at the St. Boniface General Hospital).

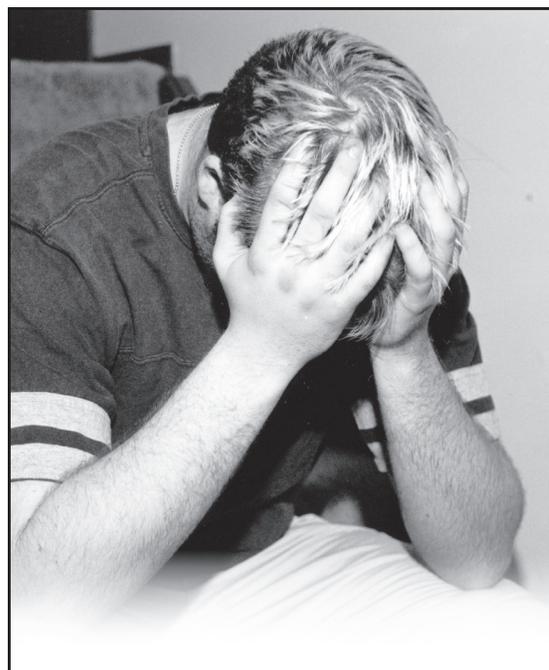
Patricia Furer, Ph.D., C. Psych., is a clinical psychologist with the Anxiety Disorders Program at St. Boniface Hospital and Associate Professor of Clinical Health Psychology at the University of Manitoba. Dr. Furer specializes in the assessment and cognitive-behavioural treatment of anxiety disorders. She has written papers and book chapters on health anxiety and other anxiety disorders. Recently she has published *Treating Health Anxiety and Fear of Death: A Practitioner's Guide* together with colleagues Drs. John Walker and Murray Stein. Dr. Furer can be reached via email at furerp@cc.umanitoba.ca.

Check out the **FREE INFORMATION NIGHT** on Health Anxiety & Fear of Death with Dr. Furer advertised on the back page of this publication.

If you experience:

- ✓ Persistent, senseless worry
- ✓ Unexplained heart racing
- ✓ Difficulty sleeping
- ✓ Fatigue
- ✓ "Wired" or tense feelings
- ✓ Extreme shyness

We can help.
Call **925-0600**
www.adam.mb.ca



PERSONAL STORIES

Armed to Fight and yet ...

Stress and mental illness is not unique to people with little or no knowledge of how to keep themselves healthy. For the past 35 years I have worked in the field of counselling and in fact have a graduate degree in Educational Psychology and Hypnosis.

As with many folks, my problems with anxiety began early in life. When I was very young I suffered from exam trauma to the point that in one case I couldn't even put my name on my test paper. Also, every time holidays came around I would have a few days of flu-like symptoms. At the time, I learned that if I persisted and went on vacation the symptoms would subside. These problems, of course, were just the beginning stages of what would later become full blown anxiety attacks and depression.



They say people go into Psychology to help themselves as much as to help others and that is also my story. I began my career in Psychology at the University of Winnipeg where I proceeded to fail the first set of exams! With the help of Dr. Barry Noonan, I discovered what my problem was and learned how to defeat it by using various coping skills. From then on I was on the Dean's Honour List every year. Some years later I graduated with a Masters Degree in

Educational Psychology from the University of Manitoba with a 3.75 GPA. At the same time I took hypnosis training and used it to reduce stress and anxiety in myself and others.

My "crisis" occurred after working for years in all the jails, the penitentiary, and most of the reserves in Manitoba. The resulting stress landed me in the Selkirk Crisis Centre. Remember, I was a trained professional and still it didn't keep me from getting the same illness from which many of you suffer.

Thanks to monthly group sessions with ADAM in Selkirk as well as the help of Dr Roger Graham (my psychiatrist at The Selkirk Mental Health Outpatient Department) I am back on track and doing very well. Both served to remind and encourage me to use the skills I already had. Medication has also been helpful for me, but it took a lot of trial and error to find the right one.

The long and short of my story: don't ever give up. Anxiety Disorders strike even those who are armed to fight them. They can be beaten and eventually you will succeed. Just keep trying until you find what works for you. I now count myself lucky to be someone who has experienced and overcome their anxiety and as a result has empathy and wishes to provide help for those who are struggling. Good luck as you continue on your adventure.

Dave Place M.Ed. (Psy)
Gateway Counselling Services - Selkirk

A Journey Worth Taking

My first introduction to panic came when I was in grade 7. I remember it like it was yesterday. My family and I had just visited Sea World in Orlando and it had been a great day. I got into the car and we started driving down the freeway. All of a sudden my heart started to beat faster, I couldn't breathe, and I knew I was dying. I did wonder why my parents could not see this. I wanted to scream look at me I am dying but I didn't. So what does a 12 year old do? I counted; I counted because I wanted to know how long this agony would last, before death would take its toll. To my surprise I survived to get out of the car and say goodnight but I was pretty sure that was the last time I would see my family. I did wake up the next day and I felt pretty good. I did not tell a soul because I was pretty sure I was going crazy. The rest of the trip went well but as the long ride back to Canada approached I felt nervous. I counted from the time I sat my rear on the car seat to the time we got home.

Life continued as usual but I avoided getting into a vehicle at all costs. I believed driving on the highway caused me to feel sick. If I had no choice but to get into a vehicle I drank Pepto Bismal. This remedy worked until I attended university. There, full blown panic had me in its grip. I did not attend class, but got all the notes from friends. I would hide in my closet so my roommate would think I had gone to class. Believe it or not I did make it through my first year but decided it was school that made me sick. No one knew my dark secret - I was crazy.

Eventually I married and became agoraphobic (although I did not have a name for this at the time). I was a master manipulator at giving reasons why I could not leave my home. Life threw us a surprise. My husband was in an accident and hospitalized for a year. I did make myself leave the house and I learned to drive again all on my own. I thought

my husband's problems snapped me out of my insanity. Life continued although I did have a lot of aches and pains and I frequently thought I was dying of something.

We had a family and after my son was born I crashed. All the anxiety was back and it brought its friend depression along for the ride. I swore I would be strong enough to handle this on my own and I did (not a great job) for four years. Then one day I could not get out of bed and my lovely husband took me to the hospital. I could have kissed the doctor when he said I had anxiety and depression. Finally there was a name for this insidious feeling I had. I worked with the doctors and the first place I was referred to was ADAM in Winkler. There I met a wonderful lady who set me on the track to recovery. I would love to tell everyone that it was happily ever after. Unfortunately or fortunately (depends how you look at life) this is not what happened. I was taught how to live again and how to manage my anxiety. More importantly I learned that my life was a journey of recovery and it was o.k. to redefine myself as many times as I needed. Did I learn positive insightful things? Yes. I also learned to be open to the many-not so positives in my life. I am definitely a control freak. Sometimes that serves me well, but most times not so much. I am somewhat of a perfectionist but I am learning it is o.k. to be human.

Sooo my most recent excitement to date is - I get to work for ADAM as an outreach worker. I am humbled to be able to give back some of what I have learned and am continuing to learn (because life is a journey). My hope is to help people realize that this is a journey worth taking.

Tami Giesbrecht
ADAM Central Outreach Worker



BOOK REVIEW

The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment.

By Eckhart Tolle

In recent years hundreds of spiritual and psychological self-help books have been published. One of the most important is *The Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle. The book arose out of the author's personal journey from despair to spiritual awakening. Tolle draws from many spiritual traditions as well as psychology. He uses a very effective question and answer approach which makes his book quite easy to read and understand.

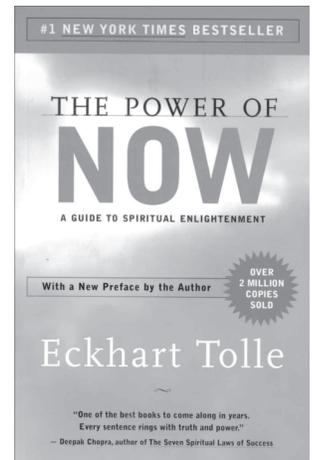
According to the author, the chief obstacle we face is the 'tyranny' of the mind. "Thinking has become a disease." Ideas, images, judgments etc. flit through our heads at 100 kilometers an hour making it impossible to get in touch with our essential self – our Being. Making things even worse, our mind is constantly jumping from past to future, between memory and anticipation. Tolle emphasizes that only the present is real – the past and future do not exist. Failure to live in the present produces an underlying sense of anxiety and incompleteness. Most pain is unnecessary because it results from non-acceptance of what is.

The solution is to disidentify with the mind. This, Tolle argues, is possible for everyone – indeed, it is our natural

state. But, how to do this? Essentially it involves the moment by moment inner full acceptance (I prefer the word "embrace") of everything life has to offer. Tolle offers up several ways to do this. It is necessary to get in touch with one's physical body and its senses and most importantly one's inner Being. Tolle recommends meditation and visualization. However, the real key is to be conscious of the stillness within as we go about our daily lives. Living in the now will also transform one's relationships and even illness.

The last question Tolle poses is "How will one know when he/she has surrendered to the now?" The answer is "When one no longer needs to ask the question." This book review has only skimmed the surface. To fully grasp and apply Tolle's teaching, the book must be read.

Reviewed by Lloyd Penner. Lloyd teaches history at various universities. For the past 10 years he has dealt with anxiety and panic issues. He has found Tolle's book very helpful in dealing with one of the root causes of anxiety which is the tendency to relive the past and worry about the future. When he truly lives in the present (the now) and gets in touch with his breath, he is usually able to transform anxiety and panic into calmness and courage.



ADAM at the Wellness Institute (Seven Oaks General Hospital)

FREE Information Session

Social Anxiety: More Than Just Shyness

Are you painfully shy? Do you know someone who is? Learn about social phobia – an extreme fear that controls and cripples lives. If left untreated it can interfere with career, school, and relationships. Find out how you can recognize the signs and discover effective, available treatments. There is hope!

**Monday, November 17, 2008
7pm - 9pm**

Pre-registration required  Call **632-3900**

Dying of Embarrassment?

- ♦ Difficulty eating or writing in public
- ♦ Difficulty maintaining eye contact
- ♦ Blushing, sweating, dry mouth, racing heart in social situations



**We can help.
Call 925-0600.
www.adam.mb.ca**

What has ADAM done for you?

- We want to hear your stories
- Anxiety Disorders can be beaten
- Let's spread the good news

Please email submissions to:
wendy@adam.mb.ca

Health Anxiety & Fear of Death

***FREE** Information Night*

with

Dr. Patricia Furer
C. Psych.

- Bring your Questions
- Learn Cognitive Behavioural Strategies
- Discover Treatment Options

If you or someone
you love **worries**
excessively about:

- Dying
- Cancer
- Lumps & Bumps
- Twitches & Pain

then this information
night is for you.

Monday,
November 24, 2008

7 - 9 pm

4 Fort Street

Pre-registration required

925-0600

www.adam.mb.ca

ADAM

Anxiety Disorders

Association of Manitoba