

## **CBT in Georgia**

The Association of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy of Georgia was founded in 2010 by a small initiative group of Georgian psychiatrists and psychologists. The idea of establishing the Association came about in 2004-2005 when the Global Initiative in Psychiatry and the Georgian Mental Health Association invited Dr Louise Johns from the Institute of Psychiatry in London to Georgia. A number of mental health professionals were trained and supervised by Dr Johns in CBT specifically for psychoses, depression and anxiety disorders. One of the positive outcomes from the training was the 2006 publication of the book entitled *Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy* in the Georgian language, which contained the training materials. At the same time, discussions started in earnest on how to deal with the difficulties hampering the implementation of CBT in various services within Georgia. These difficulties (which still exist) can be summarized as follows:

- There is a limited number of CBT therapists within Georgia.
- There is limited access on literature (especially in the Georgian language), as well as the nonexistence of internationally recognized accredited courses and/or supervision which makes it very difficult to train therapists.

These difficulties have become a key concern for newly developed outpatient psychiatric services. The situation was further aggravated after the military conflict between Georgia and Russia in August 2008. The need for evidence based psychotherapy was incredibly crucial for treating over 160,000 internally displaced people suffering from various trauma-related psychological difficulties.

In September 2008, Dr Jane Rawls from the New Zealand Psychological Society and her husband Dr Barry Parsonson from the University of Waikato, New Zealand, trained and supervised a small group of Georgian psychologists and psychiatrists in trauma-focused CBT. They assisted Georgian specialists to deal with conflict-related trauma difficulties in children, adolescents and adults.

Finally, the two waves of mental health specialists trained by international professionals came together and formed the Georgian Association, with the aim of disseminating and promoting CBT in different settings across the country. Meanwhile, a training programme on CBT for mental health specialists was accredited in 2009 by the Georgian Ministry of Health.

The members of the Georgian Association are continuing psychotherapeutic activities in their private practice, while supporting each other through the sharing of experiences about dealing with problems faced in the process of delivering therapy. The data in regards to the effectiveness of CBT in treating disorders - such as schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders, anxiety disorders (especially for panic attacks and PTSD), OCD, and hypochondria – is being accumulated. The documentation and analysis of this data are useful in gaining a better understanding of the cultural influences (or characteristics) which play a role in the effectiveness of CBT.

Our goals also include identifying strategies for the training of qualified professionals, and raising awareness of and legitimating CBT within Georgia. We see the sharing of Western experiences as a crucial factor in our professional growth as well as our organizational development. Academic and supervisory support from Western colleagues is critical to the effective implementation of CBT in Georgia.

We look forward to collaborating with EABCT and its members and hope to become a ‘Western CBT family member’ in the future.

In December, 2012 the board of the association made decision of becoming a member of European CBT association. In January, 2013 the association established contact with the representative of EABCT – Helen McDonald. Since October, 2014 GACBT becomes a full member of EABCT. GACBT has 40 members.

GACBT have passed all steps and got accreditation from the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs on 2016-2020 years. Now at the end of the educational course will give the accredited certificate to our

learners, including the specialists who have been working in the mental health network. We are sure, it will increase the interest to our program, hence not any other psychological educational program in Georgia possess the similar accreditation that gives permit-to-work in the mental health services. The other thing and the next very important step is the EABCT accreditation, as in this field we lag behind to some psychological schools.