



# OPINION

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

Box 248, 191 Main St. E.,  
Milton, Ont. L9T 4N9

(905) 878-2341

Fax: 878-4943

Classified: 875-3300

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## Obsessive-compulsive people

An obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) can be difficult for family members to understand. A person has these thoughts that just keep coming and coming ... the person doesn't know how to turn them off. These thoughts are usually accompanied by repetitive compulsive behaviour.

The person is anxious about something, a fear of bacteria may lead to excessive cleaning while a fear of being robbed may result in some pretty bizarre and elaborate rituals — checking multiple locks, or windows — numerous times each day.

These thoughts and rituals are not to be taken lightly, as they will interfere more and more with daily life and may devastate a family. It may take hours to prepare to leave the house.

In some cases, kids can't have friends over and parents don't socialize at their home because of the fear other people will bring bacteria into the house. Family members get frustrated and upset because they can't seem to reason with the victim.

The problem is not a rational one and the person cannot be talked out of it no matter what you say. It often leads to a break-up of the family, loss of a job, loss of friendships and social activities.

Help is on the way, however. A recent study by Jeff Schwartz, M.D., at UCLA, revealed that cognitive-behaviour therapy can produce dramatic results. Moreover, the treatment produced observable biological changes in areas of the brain where OCD is known to reside.

This study, published in the February 15 issue of Archives of General Psychiatry, ran a 10-week program of cognitive behaviour therapy and took positron emission tomography (PET) scans of the brain before and after the treatment.

Four areas of the brain work in lockstep to bring about the obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviour. One area (orbital frontal cortex) acts as a warning system for the brain. Two others (caudate nucleus and cingulate gyrus) speed your heart rate when you feel threatened. The fourth area (thalamus) relays messages. These four areas work overtime in a person with OCD.

Therapy was found to set these functions apart, to disassociate them more and more, allowing the person to function normally. The looser these connections, the less obsessive and compulsive the person will be.

Dr. Schwartz teaches people with OCD to recognize the situations that set them off, then gives



*Psychology in the '90s*

with DR. ARNOLD RINCOVER

them strategies for controlling their thoughts. Some are given other, more pleasant things to think about.

They may plan their dinner, think about positive things in their lives, plan what they are going to do Saturday night or visualize themselves in a pleasant situation that they had previously experienced. Other are given activities to do in any given situation, activities that are both distracting and positive.

It may sound easy, but it's very hard work. It takes time, training and lots of support and encouragement. It often takes family counselling to get the family to understand what the person is going through and how they can encourage him or her in the right direction.

Dr. Schwartz found that six of nine patients improved significantly with cognitive behaviour treatment, and the PET scans substantiate his claim. This study not only gives more hope to OCD patients and their families, but it is the first study showing specific changes in the brain resulting from this treatment.

Most patients with OCD are treated with medication in the real world. Some medications (for example Prozac) have in fact produced similar changes in the brain, according to Dr. Schwartz, but they don't teach self-control.

Dr. Schwartz noted that patients receiving the cognitive behaviour therapy had a tremendous sense of accomplishment, a major increase in self-esteem and confidence, which doesn't usually happen when medication is the sole treatment.

Another major advantage of the cognitive behavioural treatment is that it provides concrete strategies that a person can apply to any new situation. For this reason, cognitive behavioural treatments have had more long-lasting effects than drugs in the treatment of most types of anxiety disorders.

## Looking Back ...



The swami was Ray Kolyn and he told the fortune of Susan Whitney during the Penny Carnival at Rotary Park in August, 1961. Waiting their turns were Monica Stephen (left) and Nancy Hayward, playground supervisor, who was in charge of the whole affair.

## Sometimes they get it right

Occasionally, one of our many governments does the right thing.

In early October, Premier Mike Harris followed through on his election pledge to reduce the number of MPPs sitting in the Ontario legislature. The Tories have introduced a bill, entitled the 'Fewer Politicians Act', which will pare down the number of MPPs from 130 to 103.

There are those who will cry blue murder over this. They think big government is good government and that Ontario needs more legislators to represent the population, not less. They contend that Mr. Harris' move to cut the number of MPPs is simply a cynical political ploy to shore up voter support. But many of these criticisms come from none other than those MPPs who stand to lose their jobs in the process.

Taking a more objective view, taxpayers and electors should cheer the move to a smaller legislature. Here's why.

- **It will save money** — Because the new provincial boundaries will correspond to federal election districts, taxpayers will save on MPP salaries, expenses, staff, and on the costs of planning and running elections. Although the savings are only a small drop in a very large bucket, they nevertheless all add up. Ontarians will reap a \$2.1 million annual savings just in MPP salaries. That's \$2.1 million that can go to reducing the province's deficit.

- **It will restore the principle of one person, one vote** — As they now stand, Ontario's electoral boundaries are anything but democratic. Suburban voters, for example, are grossly under-represented. Their votes are worth less than those in the cities or rural areas. The new boundaries will provide a much purer (although

Let's Talk Taxes



with PAUL PAGNUELO

not perfect) form of representation by population, a cornerstone of western democracy.

- **It will prevent gerrymandering** — Manipulating constituency boundaries to secure the greatest possible advantage for the governing party is a well-honed practice in provincial politics. Mr. Harris has helped reduce the likelihood of gerrymandering in Ontario by adopting the boundaries set out by the impartial Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission.

In aligning the new boundaries based on the work done by a body outside the legislature's jurisdiction, the number of seats held by each party should more accurately reflect the votes cast in any given election.

- **It emphasizes the need for fiscal responsibility** — Ontarians will only accept the need for spending reductions (which, incidentally, are absolutely necessary) if they are applied fairly across the board. Saving the perks, pay and jobs of politicians, while the rest of the population is forced to tighten its collective belt, would be sheer hypocrisy.

Since assuming office, Mr. Harris has done more than any Ontario premier before him in providing leadership by example. First he did that by scrapping the MPPs' gold-plated pension plan and tax-free allowances, and now by reducing the number of MPPs. He should next fire his guns on the political donation tax credit which is used to subsidize country club memberships, suits, dry cleaning, and other perks for party officials and MPPs. It's unfair that taxpayers are being forced to pay, not only for the weenie-roasts and golf games of party members, but also for political views and opinions they oppose.

**Tax Fact:** Ontario's provincial auditor has given the Mike Harris government a 'thumbs up' for improvements to the province's accounting practices.

'Let's talk taxes' is provided by the Ontario Taxpayers Federation.



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