



<http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/woman/health/health/2980002/Revolutionary-help-on-hand-for-Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder.html>

A revolution in war-stress solutions...



Hero... L/Cpl Johnson Beharry

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TWO shocking stories this week highlighted the struggle many of our brave Forces' personnel face AFTER they leave the battlefield - but revolutionary help is at hand.

Victoria Cross hero, L/Cpl Johnson Beharry revealed how he tried to commit suicide in 2008 by crashing his car at 100mph after battling depression triggered by the horrors of Iraq four years earlier.

Meanwhile, ex-soldier Michael Fong admitted trying to take his own life last month after suffering Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) from his time in Ulster and Iraq.

PTSD is thought to affect one in 20 UK troops and can cause horrendous flashbacks and traumatic nightmares.



Brave ... Johnson Beharry with his Victoria Cross

But there are now incredible treatments offered to soldiers to help them overcome the ordeals of war, including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprogramming (EMDR).

In a session of EMDR, a patient is asked to talk about a traumatic incident while a therapist sends their mind into a similar state to dreaming. The patient is completely awake and aware.

While talking about the incident, their eyes follow a dot moving left to right on a computer screen.

They do this for around three minutes and repeat ten times in a session.

This helps to reprogramme the memory, so a patient can think about an incident without getting upset.

Medics use CBT to stabilise a patient before further therapy. For example, a veteran may have a phobia of helicopters, the sound of one triggering a panic attack.

Using CBT, a therapist will help a patient to confront that fear, perhaps by showing a patient pictures of a helicopter and then visiting an airbase.

Macho

They then tackle the incident that sparked the fear in the first place.

But the first step in dealing with PTSD is to get the patient to talk directly about the traumatic event.

Dr Walter Busuttill is Director of Medical Services at charity Combat Stress, which supports returning ex-military personnel with mental health problems.

The former military psychiatrist, who served for 16 years in the RAF, says: "Many ex-servicemen find it difficult to admit they have a problem as they live in a very macho environment. We help them understand they're not alone, that what they are going through is not weakness."

He says that many suffer from so-called "survivor's guilt" after living through an incident which killed or injured their friends. Or they may be suffering over an incident they feel they caused, like a pal getting injured.

Dr Busuttill explains: "In such a case, we ask them if they are being reasonable in the way they are thinking."

But finding the real source of their angst can sometimes take months. He says: "First they'll talk about what they want, then as the sessions go on, they'll give you gold nuggets of what is really causing the problems."

Dr Busuttill says most cases of PTSD don't begin until 18 months after leaving the Army. Despite this, servicemen take an average of 14 years to seek help.

In that time, many have experienced failed marriages, drinking problems, job insecurity and some have even become homeless.

Dr Busuttill explains: "Sufferers may isolate themselves and have difficulty concentrating.

"Many experience violent nightmares or flashbacks. They may find it hard to queue in the supermarkets without getting annoyed and sometimes walk down the aisles of a shop looking for signs of danger. Some even use a weapon to protect themselves but this is quite rare.

"But the good news is that, if they come forward, we have excellent ways of treating them."