

The LEADER

RTM treatment shows promise

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Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is one of the most pressing mental health concerns of our time. Nearly a fourth of all veterans from the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are suffering from the condition, as well as victims of rape, car accidents, and other horrific events.

It has proven even more difficult to treat, with many psychotherapy treatments and drug cocktails unable to relieve sufferers of terrible flashbacks and nightmares.

However, Dr. Frank Bourke, a clinical psychologist based out of Corning, has spent the last 10 years researching and developing a therapy that he and his team say is both effective and very promising.

And he has the data to back it up.

“This is the biggest advance in the treatment of PTSD in the last 50 years,” Bourke said.

The treatment is called Reconsolidation of Traumatic Memory (RTM) protocol. It doesn't require any drugs, instead asking the patient to envision themselves watching the traumatic event as a black and white movie, followed by a series of steps that encourage the patient's brain to reclassify the memory so that it no longer terrorizes the individual.

“If I asked you, ‘what scared you in your life?’ You would go back to a stored movie,” Bourke said. “And you would be replaying that movie. What the protocol does is get you relaxed, and to play that movie in different formats.”

“Traumatic memories are stored in a part of the brain that doesn't allow any changes,” he added. “The protocol is a neurological interdiction, done using talking therapy. What happens is that the neurological connection between the

memory, and the hippocampus and the emotional reaction place in the brain severs.”

“You change the movie.”

The therapy is usually conducted over a series of five 90 minute sessions.

A few years after cultivating the therapy during his time in New York City -- where he counseled hundreds of survivors in the aftermath of 9/11 -- Bourke founded the nonprofit Research and Recognition Project to research and advance the technique.

The treatment has had its share of skeptics since the Research and Recognition Project began to introduce it into the research community, but early studies have shown the treatment shows promise.

Bourke and his colleagues have performed several small-scale replication studies of the RTM Protocol. In the pilot study of 26 veterans, 25 of them no longer test as having PTSD, and their symptoms were relieved in under five sessions.

In the following study of 30 male military veterans, 88 percent had lost Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) diagnosis for PTSD. The following study featured 30 female military veterans, with 96.5 percent of them losing DSM diagnosis.

In the latest study of 74 male veterans, 71 percent of them lost DSM diagnosis for PTSD.

Bourke and his team also analyzed patients’ brains in EEG scans before and following therapy, and observed noticeable differences in brain activity.

As a result of successful trials, Bourke’s work has begun appearing in medical journals, including the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA). His work has also received support from the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs, New York State Council of Veterans Organizations, SUNY Upstate Medical University, and the Blue Angels Foundation.

“Seeing the results is huge,” Research and Recognition Project CFO Bob Salluzzo said. “This works as advertised, it works with regularity, and it can be replicated,

and it's now time to get it out there into the public use.”

Bourke has since come to an agreement with the Manchester, NH Veterans Administration to train 30 staff members as part of a pilot training program to administer the therapy. If successful, it's hoped that Bourke and his team may get an opportunity to administer training to staff at 300 VA community centers around the country.

Going forward, Bourke hopes to establish a new headquarters in Corning for the Research and Recognition Project.

“I'd like a center here,” Bourke said. “I'd like to have an office here where we can center the data and the research.”

“This thing is going to get enlarged.”

Bourke said state funding for the group's research was made possible with the help of Rep. Tom O'Mara, R-Big Flats.

For more information, visit the Research and Recognition Project's website at [**www.nlprandr.org**](http://www.nlprandr.org).