Main treatment steps of cognitive therapy

The form of cognitive therapy used in this trial is based on Clark’s and Wells’s1–3 maintenance model of social phobia, where different procedures are used to reverse maintaining factors identified in the model.

Main treatment steps during 75 minute session:

- **Developing a personal version of the maintenance model.** This was achieved by working with the patient’s thoughts, anxiety symptoms, images, attentional strategies, safety behaviours, and images to develop a personal version of the maintenance model.
- **Identification of key safety behaviours and self-focussed attention experiment.** Once key safety behaviours and their adverse effects were identified, participants focused attention on themselves while role playing a difficult social situation and using their safety behaviours. Their attention was then focused externally and an attempt made to drop their safety behaviours.
- **Attention shift to the social situation.** An external focus of attention was encouraged to reduce problematic self-monitoring and to get more accurate information about how other people respond.
- **Video feedback.** To help modify distorted self-imagery, the patient viewed the role playing experiment video using an instructional set designed to make discrepancies between patients’ negative, distorted self-images and their actual social performance particularly evident.
- **Behavioural experiments.** Patients identified feared outcomes for various social situations. Role playing and homework assignments to test occurrence of these outcomes during social situations were planned. Patients were encouraged to focus their attention externally and drop safety behaviours. Patients observed the consequences of their excessively rigid rules for social interaction during a set of exercises.
- **Identification of problematic anticipatory and post-event processing.** Patients were encouraged to drop anticipatory and post-event processing by discussion, which usually showed that the disadvantages of such behaviour greatly exceeded its advantages.
- **Identification of dysfunctional assumptions.** These were modified by behavioural experiments and cognitive restructuring techniques.

References