SPEAKER INFORMATION

Jamie Bristow is Director of the Mindfulness Initiative, an advocacy project aimed at increasing awareness of how mindfulness can benefit society. The Initiative is working with parliamentarians, media and policy makers to develop recommendations on the role of mindfulness in public policy and the workplace. Jamie was formerly Business Development Director at Headspa.


Dr. David Cox is the Chief Medical Officer for Headspace (www.headspace.com), a popular global digital health platform which provides courses of guided mindful meditation via your smartphone or computer. Headspace has an active community of over 1 million meditation practitioners and is keen to make its practical and affordable platform widely available. David is a fully qualified doctor, educated at Cambridge University and Imperial College, London. He worked as an Emergency Department physician in central London for four years before embarking on a management path. He spent three years consulting to health systems with McKinsey & Co., and has also worked in the NHS in a city-wide health system design role and as an operational manager of the largest hospital group in London.

David is responsible for overseeing all scientific and medically-related research work that Headspace is involved in, including planned research with City University’s Centre for Psychological Wellbeing and Neuroscience. David will speak about Headspace’s wide programme of research and partnerships with academic institutions across UK and North America.
Claire Kelly is the Director of the ‘Mindfulness in Schools Project’. MiSP’s flagship .b (dot b) programme aims to encourage, support and research the teaching of secular mindfulness in schools. Claire has worked in education for 25 years and was Deputy Head at South Hampstead High School, one of the leading girls’ schools in the UK, where she initiated a mindfulness programme that continues today. Claire is a .b teacher trainer, teaches the .b Foundations course and runs introductory workshops and INSET training on mindfulness for students and teachers. Claire is also a trained teacher of mindfulness for adults (MBSR).

Claire will be speaking about MiSP’s experience of developing the .b curricula for secondary school students and its impact on the health and wellbeing of young people. She will also discuss the training of primary and secondary school teachers in mindfulness and the application of MiSP programmes to students with special educational needs, including autism spectrum disorder.

Dr. Rhiannon England is the GP Clinical Lead in Mental Health and Prescribing for the City and Hackney ClinicalCommissioning Group (CCG). Rhiannon is a passionate advocate for the parity of esteem between physical health and mental health and for preventative and integrative approaches to addressing mental health issues. She commissions innovative services to tackle physical health in mental health settings and will be discussing her Five2Thrive Wellbeing Campaign. Five2Thrive is a 5-step evidence-based approach to enhancing emotional wellbeing and includes mindfulness as a key practice. The Five2Thrive mindfulness component will be delivered by City and Hackney Mind.

Andy Phee is a mindfulness teacher working mainly with staff groups in the NHS and the third sector. He has trained with the Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice at Bangor University and with Oxford Mindfulness Centre. Andy has a background in Community Mental Health Nursing and a special interest in mindfulness groups for people experiencing distressing voices and paranoia.

Andy will outline the rationale; structure; content and evaluation of mindfulness groups that have taken place over the last five years in both the NHS and in local Mind organisations for people experiencing distressing voices; paranoia and psychosis.

Gwen Williams is a highly experienced mindfulness teacher, having trained at Bangor University’s Centre for Mindfulness and with the Mindfulness in Schools Project. She is formerly Head of Psychological Therapies at City and Hackney Mind and continues to work with them to bring mindfulness therapies to staff, clients and volunteers. She uses her experience as a psychotherapist to enrich her mindfulness teaching and to extend the access of mindfulness-based interventions to hard-to-reach and disadvantaged communities.

Miia Chambers is an experienced mindfulness trainer and coach working in private practice. She is also the Mindfulness Lead at City and Hackney Mind, developing adaptations of the standard mindfulness curricula to reach mental health populations and to address specific symptoms. She delivers a wide programme of brief and 8-week mindfulness training programmes to service users and employees, and has been mentoring a group of Recovery Champions at Mind’s Recovery College to become peer mindfulness trainers.
City University London – Department of Psychology

**Professor Bettina Forster and Hana Villar – The Neuroscience of Mindfulness**

Professor Forster joined City University London in 2004 as a lecturer. She then established the Cognitive Neuroscience Research Unit and set up the first EEG lab in the Department. More recently she co-founded the Centre for Psychological Wellbeing and Neuroscience. Prof. Forster’s research describes neural processes that occur when we perceive touch considering the influence of seeing or moving our body, expectations and social interactions. In addition, she aims to understand the role of body perception in embodied cognition including emotion perception and self-awareness and she is investigating the neural basis of psychological therapies, like mindfulness training. She has published over 50 academic articles on these topics and her research is supported by UK research councils and trusts.

Hana Villar is the Clinical Director of City and Hackney Mind, the 3rd largest Mind association in England and Wales. She is responsible for the delivery, quality and governance of a wide programme of psychological therapies, mindfulness and resilience interventions across East London. In her role at Mind, she has developed partnerships with Headspace’s charitable ‘Get Some, Give Some’ programme, the Mindfulness in Schools Project and City University’s Centre for Psychological Wellbeing and Neuroscience. She holds an MSc in Research Methods and Psychology and is currently undertaking a funded PhD in Neuroscience and Psychology at City University, under the supervision of Professor Forster and Dr. Flaxman, focusing on body awareness, attentional control and self-referential processing affected by mindfulness training in mental health populations.

Professor Forster and Hana Villar have embarked on cutting-edge research in the emerging field of clinical neuroscience, seeking to develop more accurate measurement tools to measure changes in brain functioning through mindfulness training in mental health populations. In particular, one of their aims is to substantiate the theory that Mindfulness meditation reduces mental health symptoms, in the first instance, by changing the way our brains process bodily information. Their research involves taking self-report measures (standardised questionnaires) as well as response speed and accuracy changes in brain activity (via electroencephalography) in bodily self-awareness and attention tasks. The outcome of this research will be an original contribution to neurophysiological research into Mindfulness, enabling the team to understand and measure mindfulness changes induced on a brain and experiential level. Our aim is for our research to inform mindfulness practice and thus contribute to its refinement.

**Dr. Corinna Haenschel – Improving the Quality of Life of People with Schizophrenia**

Dr Corinna Haenschel is one of the Co-Directors of the Centre for Psychological Wellbeing and Neuroscience and Programme Director of the new Masters course in Clinical, Social and Cognitive Neuroscience. She studied Psychology in Germany and obtained her PhD in Neuroscience at Imperial Medical School, London. She is a trained chartered clinical psychologist (Germany), which alongside her scientific achievements provides an ideal basis for her interest in translational research. Current research interests include working memory in healthy controls and patients with schizophrenia, the development of training programmes to improve working memory and quality of life, neuropharmacological models of working memory deficits and cognitive training effects on the brain.

Dr. Haenschel will discuss her interest in improving the quality of life of people with schizophrenia by identifying and treating underlying working memory. Even when they are not experiencing acute psychiatric symptoms people living with Schizophrenia have problems in everyday life and social interactions. It is widely accepted that treatments for schizophrenia need to do more to improve everyday life, which requires understanding and targeting of the underlying causes of these problems. Working Memory (WM) is the ability to hold and manipulate information for brief periods of time and is critically important for performing virtually all everyday tasks. Impairment of WM is a common feature of schizophrenia and often apparent before the onset of obvious psychiatric symptoms that is linked to problems of daily
Dr. Paul Flaxman – Acceptance and Commitment Therapy in the Workplace

Dr. Paul Flaxman is Senior Lecturer in Psychology at City University London. In recent years, Paul has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to explore the influence of perfectionism on employees’ well-being and leisure time recovery processes. Paul has also taken a prominent role in translating acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) into group training programmes suitable for delivery in workplace settings to improve employees’ psychological health. His research has been published in numerous articles in the CBT and occupational health literatures. Paul and his colleagues recently published their ACT-based training manual in a book entitled “The Mindful and Effective Employee”.

ACT is a modern behaviour therapy that adopts mindfulness and acceptance processes alongside values clarification and behavioural activation interventions. The aim of ACT is to enhance psychological flexibility – the ability to pursue personally valued actions and goals even while experiencing difficult or unhelpful thoughts, feelings, and sensations. Across a series of studies, ACT has been found effective for improving employees’ psychological health and behavioural functioning. Paul will describe some of the studies that have demonstrated the effects of ACT for staff in workplace settings. Paul will also illustrate some of the key features of the ACT-based training he and his colleagues have been evaluating over the past 15 years or so.

Dr. Katy Tapper - Mindfulness and Healthy Eating

Dr Katy Tapper is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at City University London. Her main research interests are health behaviour and behaviour change, with a particular emphasis on healthy eating, weight loss and physical activity. She has a background in psychology but has worked in multidisciplinary teams, developing and evaluating a wide range of health interventions for both adults and children. More recently she has been exploring the use of digital technologies to influence lifestyles and habits. These applied projects are informed by her more experimental work aimed at identifying and understanding variables that influence health-related behaviours. You can learn more about her work at www.katytapper.com

Obesity is associated with a wide range of health problems. However, rates have increased significantly in recent years such that two thirds of UK adults are now overweight or obese. Reasons for overeating vary from person to person but often include habit, mood, and food cues in the environment. Research into the use of mindfulness to promote dietary change is still relatively new but a number of studies suggest that it could be beneficial. In particular, encouraging an awareness of the sensory properties of food whilst eating might help reduce intake later in the day. Additionally, helping individuals to see themselves as separate from their thoughts and feelings could make them better able to resist tempting foods. This presentation will explore these strategies in more detail.
Dr. Angeliki Bogosian – Mindfulness Interventions for People with Neurological Conditions

My research focuses on how individuals and families adjust when affected by a neurological condition, especially multiple sclerosis (MS). In my research I use qualitative and quantitative methodologies. I also develop and evaluate mindfulness interventions to improve psychological adjustment and symptom management for people with MS and people with Parkinson’s disease.

Mindfulness interventions have been shown to reduce anxiety, depression and pain in patients with chronic physical illnesses. The presentation will cover mindfulness interventions, which aims to reduce distress for people affected by primary and secondary progressive Multiple Sclerosis (MS) and help with symptom management for people with Parkinson’s disease. We tailor the mindfulness interventions we develop to the particular needs of people with those conditions. The mindfulness courses are delivered through Skype so that patients do not need to travel or be mobile. Our tailor-made mindfulness programmes involved short weekly sessions lasting 1 hour, with daily meditation home practice lasting 10 to 20 minutes. In a recent study, we divided forty participants into two groups: those receiving eight weeks of mindfulness, and a control group. Results showed that distress scores dropped significantly in the mindfulness group immediately after the sessions and three months later. I will also talk about a mindfulness programme for people with Parkinson’s which is currently being developed.

Dr. Sebastian Gaigg – Mindfulness to Alleviate Anxiety in Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Dr Gaigg is currently a Senior Lecturer in the Psychology Department at City University London where he is a senior member of the Autism Research Group and also a member of the new Centre for Psychological Wellbeing and Neuroscience. He is also Editor-in-Chief of the Journal Research in Autism Spectrum Disorder, which publishes rigorous research on topics related to the diagnosis and treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

His research is broadly concerned with understanding the causes of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), focusing in particular on establishing what role learning, memory and emotional processes play in the development of this disorder. One of his current research projects is aimed at discovering how best to treat anxiety in ASD, which has led to a keen interest in the potential utility of mindfulness based therapies. In other projects he is investigating the causes of language impairments in ASD and the relationship between autism and schizotypy.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a lifelong developmental disorder that affects around 1% of children in the UK. It is clinically defined by abnormalities in the development of social-communication skills, sensory processing abnormalities and repetitive behaviours that begin in infancy. Around 50% of children and adults with ASD suffer from co-occurring anxiety disorders that are often more debilitating than the symptoms of ASD per se. As a result, Anxiety is amongst the most common reasons for individuals with ASD to seek medical attention.

The causes of high rates of Anxiety in ASD, and how best to treat it, remain unknown. However, we do know that individuals with ASD often have difficulties introspecting on their own emotions – an impairment known as Alexithymia. In a recent study involving 60 ASD and 65 healthy comparison individuals, we found that Alexithymia was closely associated with Anxiety in ASD. In addition, Alexithymia was associated with mindfulness based thinking, and in the ASD group mindfulness based thinking was reduced compared to the comparison group. Since mindfulness training seeks to promote introspection on inner thoughts and feelings, our observations suggest that mindfulness training may reduce Anxiety in ASD by alleviating the difficulties in emotional introspection that characterise Alexithymia.