

Appendix 9

Examiners reports – External Examiner, Dr Peter T Spencer.

- a) The subject matter of the thesis is concerned with the hypothesis that the life-long habitual patterns of responding to perceived stressors (either consciously recognised or not) may be causally involved in the development of physical illnesses, including Ischaemic Heart Disease (IHD). The results of the thesis suggested that a relatively brief programme of psychological interventions (counselling and guided imagery) led to a substantial reduction in disease symptoms, improvement in well-being and functioning and possible reversal of the disease process.
- b) The quality of the thesis was of a good standard, some of it very good. The statistical analysis is appropriate and effective, showing use of an appropriate computer package. A good balance is shown between qualitative and quantitative approaches. Useful, relevant reviews are given of IHD and emotions, counselling and other approaches, theoretical considerations, STRESS. There is an interesting small section on the important influence of Eastern philosophy on health practices.
- c) The thesis shows very much a ‘personal journey’ of research which makes the work interesting and places it in context. Whilst there is clearly the ability to evaluate research and evidence, occasionally the strong emphasis of the author’s convictions can verge on a caricature of other approaches.

For example, p64, referring to CBT, the author states “the research validation is, in fact, illusory.” This is rather a strong statement to refer to one of the most researched and evaluated forms of intervention. A number of typos and omissions are in the thesis. For example, “hierarchy” is sometimes written as “hierarchy”, including the important diagram on p67. In the reference section there are, occasionally, omissions of the date e.g. p233 Sheikh, A.A. I was surprised to see no mention of Gilbert Ryle’s work ‘The Concept of Mind’, especially as there are sections in the thesis focussing on the ideas of the concept of mind. Whilst mentioned occasionally throughout the review, the field of PSYCH NEURO IMMUNOLOGY (PNI) might have been highlighted more. The ABSTRACT needs to be more explicit about the precise findings of the thesis. There is no indication in this section of what the findings were.

- d) I feel that the thesis is an important and original contribution to knowledge in this important and rapidly expanding area. The results certainly are worthy of publication in either medical or psychological journals.
- e) This work appears to be the culmination of over thirty years thought and exploration in the area and the author not only critically evaluates clinical data, but also the underlying models, assumptions and theories underlying such data.

RECOMMENDATION: That the thesis be passed, subject to minor corrections. The suggested corrections I have discussed earlier, viz.

- i. A more precise abstract, including results
- ii. A careful check on spelling, especially the section and diagrams concerning Maslow
- iii. Ensuring all dates are included in the reference section
- iv. POSSIBLY modifying p64 with reference to CBT
- v. POSSIBLY including reference to Ryle's work and
- vi. POSSIBLY including a short extra paragraph labelled PSYCHONEUROIMMUNOLOGY.

Internal Examiner's Report – Judi Irving

The topic of this thesis concerns an exploration of the impact of counselling and guided imagery on the outcome for those suffering from ischaemic heart disease. The hypothesis presented in the thesis is that habitual patterns of responding to perceived stressors may be causally related to physical illness and that replacing these patterns may modify physical manifestations of illness. Participants were selected from the cardiology outpatients service of Pontefract General infirmary, Pontefract, West Yorkshire. Results of the study suggest that psychological interventions – counselling and guided imagery – reduced heart disease symptoms and also led to an improvement in well-being.

The candidate provides an extensive review of the literature relevant to all aspects of the thesis. He demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the medical and psychological aspects of ischaemic heart disease. He also provides relevant discussion of counselling and guided imagery, including relevant theoretical issues regarding practice and outcomes. His discussion of the physical, psychological and philosophical aspects of the nature of stress provides a useful foundation for the reader. His use of an experimental group (those participants who received counselling and guided imagery) and a control group (those who did not) is appropriate for this type of study. The candidate presents a useful balance between quantitative and qualitative methods for the investigation. The candidate's analysis of the data is thorough and appropriate.

The thesis is well-presented, with a logical structure and clear treatment of all aspects of information presented. While there are a few errors, these are minimal. The whole of the thesis 'flows' well and is very 'readable'.

The results of the study – although with a limited pool of participants – could have far reaching effects on the health care of patients with ischaemic heart disease. The thesis is clearly a contribution to knowledge in the field. While they may cause some controversy amongst professionals in that they challenge current ideas of mind-body dualism which underlie western allopathic medicine, the results certainly call for more extensive research.

The candidate clearly has a wide understanding and appreciation of his field of study. As a practicing counsellor, he has been able to make excellent use of his practical experience in informing his research. He is very sensitive to the emotional nature of his research and the ethical implications of conducting this type of study.

It is evident from the thesis that a great deal of work has gone into this research. All relevant areas are covered, discussed and clearly presented. The thesis is academically sound, but unlike the majority of doctoral theses I have examined, it was also a delight to read! It is my opinion that the thesis is clearly of PhD standard.

Examiners Comments on the Candidate's Performance in the Oral Examination

The examination enabled a wide range of issues to be discussed and allowed the candidate an opportunity to elaborate on his work. Through this process it was very clear that the candidate was highly committed to his work, and he talked lucidly and was proud of it – rightly so. It was obvious that he knew his work very well. Indeed, at times the candidate needed to emphasise the merits of his work as a piece of ‘real-world’ research and acknowledged the potential contributions that could be extrapolated to counselling provision for IHD patients.

A large number of issues were raised and we were impressed by the candidate's response to these, particularly in terms of both the personal, psychological and biomedical aspects of the research. All of the challenges offered to him were understood and he was able to take time to think and respond thoughtfully, even under pressure!

As a consequence of the examination we have asked the candidate to make some minor corrections: a (very) few typographical errors, possibly a paragraph to clarify assertions made about CBT, and to slightly expand the abstract to make it more precise, including details of the results.

Based on the oral examination and on the written thesis, (once the minor revisions are made) we are satisfied that the candidate be awarded his PhD.

Peter Spencer, External Examiner
Judi Irving, Internal Examiner

30 May 2006