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Establishing and running an Eating Disorders Service

Claire Houston

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Summary by Frank Kelley

Dr Claire Houston, MSc, PGDip CBT, PGCert HE, BABCP-Accredited, is the Founder & Clinical Director of *All Well & Good*.

She is a Cognitive Behavioural Therapist and Senior Lecturer in CBT, University of Greater Manchester and Trainer & Supervisor for BEAT, an Eating Disorders Charity. Claire has dedicated the past 15+ years of her career to working with people affected by eating disorders across inpatient, outpatient, and day care settings, including *The Priory* in Altrincham and *Orri* in London. She is now the Founder and Clinical Director of *All Well & Good*, a specialist therapy service based in Chester.

Claire provides training and supervision for BEAT, the UK's leading eating disorder charity, and specialises in evidence-based interventions including CBT-ED, DBT, and MANTRA-informed approaches. Her clinical and teaching work focuses on translating complex theory into accessible, compassionate, and practical strategies for both clients and clinicians.

For more go to the website at [All Well and Good](https://www.allwellandgood.co.uk)

Claire was a mental health nurse and had worked at the Priory with people with addictions. The staff on her acute mental health ward had no experience of working with people with eating disorders. Her back problems meant she could no longer work on her acute ward, so she looked for work in community support.

So nothing prepared her for her work at *All Well & Good*.

Eating disorders are a serious mental illness and includes:

- Anorexia Nervosa
- Bulimia
- Binge eating disorder (BED)
- Other specified feeding or eating disorder (OSFED)
- Avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder (ARFID),

These illnesses involve disturbances in eating behaviour, body image and emotional regulation. There are high rates of mortality and relapse, and also high rates of recovery with the right care. Early intervention saves lives and the determination to eat or starve can become a healthier determination to recover.

However care is complex as eating disorders combine biological, psychological and social factors. It is about more than food and weight. Her students point out eating disorders are so complex and hard to work with. Clients can be seen as difficult, manipulative and time wasting. But much of this is because they are highly frightened. All this can lead to a high rate of professional burn out.

Her service offers Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapy (CBT) and Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT) and therapists aim to work transdiagnostically. Group therapy can be effective. Clients who are well supported by staff will be helpful with other members of the group.

Mapping is useful. It can help clients ask what does my eating disorder look like now, what did it look like in the past and what will it look like in the future. Unlike some other therapies this work can involve behavioural activation. Over talking can reduce activation. So do the doing first.

Also, keep in mind that eating disorders overlap with neurodiversity.

Therapies offered by BEAT are:

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Eating Disorders (CBT-E)

In Stage One, the focus is on gaining a mutual understanding of the person's eating problem and helping him or her to modify and stabilise their pattern of eating. In the brief second stage, progress is systematically reviewed and plans are made for the main body of treatment. Stage Three consists of a run of weekly sessions focused on the processes that are maintaining the person's eating problem. Towards the end of Stage Three and in Stage Four the emphasis shifts onto the future. There is a focus on dealing with setbacks and maintaining the changes that have been obtained.

MANTRA places greater emphasis than CBT on motivation, emotional understanding, and self-identity. Therapy is evidence based and is known to be effective in treating restrictive eating disorders.

Family Based Therapy (FBT) is manualized outpatient therapy designed to restore adolescents to health with the support of their parents.

In working with people with eating disorders you will find that recovery is not linear and that ambivalence is not failure. Authenticity builds trust. Claire believes that the recovery of brain and body takes about seven years.

Thank you to Claire Houston. Her enthusiasm was infectious, she was knowledgeable and experienced and her ability to engage with an unfamiliar group of therapists impressive.