

EMDR to treat substance abuse and addiction

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The comorbidity of PTSD and substance abuse gives sufficient reason to treat patients who are addicted with EMDR targeting the traumatic memories, which drive the comorbid PTSD. However, there are several pathways leading to addiction and PTSD is only one of them. Thirty years of addiction research have provided sufficient evidence for the crucial role of memory in drug dependency. The Addiction memory (AM) serves as a useful concept for “obsessive-compulsive craving” to be seen in drug addicted patients (Boening, 2001). The concept of an AM and its importance in relapse occurrence and maintenance of learned addictive behaviour has gained growing acceptance in the field of addiction research and treatment. The AM is interpreted as an individual-acquired memory following drug consumption in some individuals. The addiction memory is based on normal memory systems and systems of neuronal information processing. This neurobiological-based, imprinted, addictive behaviour seems to resist change under normal circumstances. The implicit nature of the addiction memory seems to qualify it as a target for EMDR treatment.

In a pilot-study group of 34 patients with chronic alcohol dependency in in-patient treatment for detoxification were randomly assigned to one of two treatment conditions: treatment as usual (TAU) or TAU+EMDR. In the TAU+EMDR group patients received two sessions of EMDR focussing on memories of intense craving or relapse in order to activate and reprocess the addiction memory. The craving for alcohol was measured by the Obsessive-Compulsive-Drinking-Scale (OCDS) pre, post, and 1 month after treatment. The TAU+EMDR group showed a significant reduction in craving post-treatment and 1 month after treatment whereas TAU did not. The TAU+EMDR group showed less relapse at the six-month follow-up. The results indicate that EMDR might be a useful approach for the treatment of addiction memory and associated symptoms of craving (Hase et al. 2008)..

This Workshop will address the EMDR treatment of comorbid PTSD and serves as an introduction into the application of EMDR as an adjunct in addiction treatment. The current EMDR approaches like DETUR by Popky and the Feeling State Addiction Protocol by Miller will be briefly introduced.