

Shokat Ali's experience with Hardeep and his family (wife, Seema; father, Harjinder)

Part 1, Assessment meeting on 15th May 2015

Hardeep (aged 30, husband to Seema, and father of two babies, all living with his parents) was recommended to me by a relative of theirs I'd successfully treated. He and Seema arrived from Leeds, after he'd been doing his best to follow my strict requirement not to take any alcohol before the therapy. Although he presented as coherent and lucid, he was in a jumpy and nervous state, torn between craving alcohol and terror of dying from it. The couple said I was their last hope and begged me to help where nothing and nobody else had (the longest he'd been sober since 2011 was for a month in the rehab centre). I suspected he had been taking alcohol during the 3-week period before my treatment, but couldn't prove it – and at least he was too jumpy to have been drinking recently. Later (at his 3-month follow up) he admitted he'd never stopped drinking but had fooled his family by finding a way to 'cheat' the breathalyser (by changing the batteries for old, almost spent ones). Before signing up for the LifePrinciples programme, the methods he'd tried included:

Residential rehabilitation: his father paid £10,000 for Hardeep to spend 30 days in a private clinic. He said they told him to do the 12-step programme (of Alcoholics Anonymous) and gave him Librium. He didn't 'take to' the 12-Step programme (he'd attended 4 meetings in his local area and hated them), and he actually drank either on the day or the day after he was discharged. He felt aggrieved about this whole episode because just before his release (when he had not had alcohol for 30 days while under their supervision) he said he told the clinic's management his craving for alcohol was no less than on Day 1, but the response had been just to invite him to pay another £10k to repeat the treatment. He declined, having lost any faith they could help him.

The NHS: his GP diagnosed possible depression and prescribed Prozac and beta blockers, and also said rehab wasn't necessary (because he'd tried it already), and besides there were very long waiting lists. When Hardeep returned to the GP after 3 weeks and said the medication wasn't helping, he was given a larger dose, which also didn't work, and advised to seek counselling. He kept maintaining he was not at all depressed, just desperate (for control over his drinking).

Private counselling: he paid £1,000 for 10x1-hour sessions, but had felt no benefit from this (used to leave her place and go straight out drinking).

After the failed rehab and failure with Prozac and beta blockers, his GP sent him to the **Leeds Addiction Centre**, which gave him the same advice and treatment he'd had in the residential clinic, but as an out-patient, so he continued to drink unhindered while taking the Librium. Because of its calming effect and help with e.g. sweats and shakes, this family of drugs is the medical first choice in helping wean alcoholics off drinking.

My conclusion

That Hardeep was not only addicted to alcohol but also suffered a strong compulsion to self-medicate (including by self-harming which – contrary to popular belief – is not suicidal but is done for the 'buzz' of the release of serotonin following the intense pain of cutting or burning).

Part 2 – Progress after initial hypnotherapy session

After just one session, Hardeep reported losing all desire for alcohol, and feeling very happy. He could look at the drinks in the hotel bar and decide he wanted a coca cola. Seema was utterly amazed at how ‘fresh and confident’ he felt. He had plans to put the money he was saving from not buying alcohol by, and spend it on treats for his family at the end of each month. He also reported feeling ‘more open’ and able to express feelings. Seema commented: ‘If this is the result we have had after a night, then I am looking forward to the next 20 years.’

Second progress meeting

(Five weeks after start of programme) Hardeep reported not having ‘touched a drop of alcohol’ and continuing to feel very good in himself, including more lively and active. His initial doubts and fears that this treatment also would fail had given way to optimism and confidence.

Seema reported a ‘fantastic month’. She’d returned to work while Hardeep looked after the two babies (aged 18 months and 8 months). He was also managing a property for a family member. She was delighted that his attitude and personality had changed for the better, he was eating healthily, sleeping well, happy and no longer isolating himself. For the first time, he had bonded with his 8 month old son. That day they both said they were convinced they could not have made this progress without me. Hardeep actually said: ‘Without you, I would have died. I would have lost my family, I would have lost everything. I would have carried on drinking every single day.’ Seema said: ‘In our opinion you are a godsend and you are a doctor, you are more than a doctor. Our own doctor didn't support us, you have given us that support. You kept in touch with us, you are following us through this. We’ve never had that. Normally, you have your treatment and they let you go.’

What pleased me most was that Hardeep had come to a key realisation: that he could never be a ‘social’ drinker, although that had been his hope all along. He’d finally got the message that he could never afford to have even one drink, or even one sip, of alcohol.

My observations

From the video, it can be concluded that Hardeep and Seema were more negative about the NHS than any other route they’d tried before coming to me. Below is the transcript of a video of his father, which shows the extent of Hardeep’s alcoholism:

3-month progress check-up with Hardeep and Harjinder, his father.

Harjinder: ‘My son was an alcoholic. I sent him to rehab and it cost me £10k (plus VAT), soon as he came out of rehab he was on the drink again the next day. And he could not stop drinking. He tried everything. When he came to you, it was like a miracle, he stopped completely. I am a proud man now, a proud dad.’

Not only had Hardeep’s sober progress continued, he said he felt repelled by even the smell of vodka when washing up a glass his father had used that contained it.

In this session, Hardeep told me of the tricks he had used to ‘cheat’ the breathalyser (outlined above). Part of the family’s efforts to ‘help’ him had been to breathalyse him routinely!

Although I remained quite doubtful about the way the family drank in his presence and even took him to pubs – and sent him out to buy alcohol – I took his owning up to what he used to do as a very positive sign that he really had lost interest in alcohol.

He was so well he’d even opened a business and had sold 8 cars in the previous month. He’d made a lot of money and was buying all sorts of things for his children and wife. He also reported having recovered ‘100%’ the fee he’d paid for his treatment with me, adding: ‘Yes, and I am better off for it...a week or so ago, my dad said to me: You know what? the best thing you ever did was going to Birmingham to see Shokat... it was funny because we were watching TV and James Carl came on and said to the [alcoholic] guy, “We are going to send you to the best rehab ever, it's called the Open Mind in Wrexham” – and that's where I went too!’

Arranged to see him again in another 3 months.