

RBMT Interview

Harcourt Assessment Neuropsychology Manager Abigail Squire (AS) speaks to Rivermead Behavioural Memory Test author Barbara Wilson (BW) about the new third edition:

AS: Well thank you Barbara for talking with us today about the new Rivermead Behavioural Memory Test, the third version of the test.

What we're going to do today is talk a bit about the test and what's new and changed and so forth.

A.S How does this test differ from other memory tests?

BW: The Rivermead Behavioural Memory Test predicts everyday functioning by using examples that are analogous to real life situations and we know from previous research that this test is a good predictor of independence and employability.

AS: So there's been two new versions of the test since the first one in 1985, so why do we need a new version of this test now?

BW: Well I think there are several reasons for it, first we wanted to assess a wider range of ability. The original test was fine for people with moderate to severe brain injury but it wasn't so good at picking up those who had very subtle or milder problems.

Secondly we wanted to include more contemporary and more multi-racial material. The second version did that to some extent but I think this final version is better at that.

And then thirdly we wanted to assess the ability to learn a new skill which is an important memory task in everyday life.

We'd originally planned to have learning a new skill in the very first RBMT that came out in 1985 but when we were doing the preparatory work for that we were using a calculator and teaching people to do a new skill on the calculator.

There were two problems there, first they kept changing the design of that particular calculator that we were working on and secondly it was very expensive to include as part of the test so we dropped it for the 1985 version. I was always very sorry we dropped it because I think it's a good task to include. So this time we've got a new skill that doesn't require expensive equipment and we're very happy with that test being included.

And finally we wanted to look at implicit memory, which I think is an important aspect of memory to look at but it's very rarely formally assessed and as far as I know there is no published implicit memory test. If we want to assess implicit we have to beg steal or borrow somebody else's!

AS: When we talk about the Rivermead Behavioural Memory Test one of the phrases that often comes up is that it's an 'ecologically valid approach' to assessment. Can you tell us a bit more about why that's so important in assessment?

BW: Well the ecologically valid approach is an approach where we are trying to predict real life problems. Most memory tests that are available look at various aspects of memory such as recall and recognition or visual and verbal memory and although this is important information it doesn't tell us about everyday life functioning. The Rivermead's designed to do just that. So that's all the ecologically valid bit means - it's more predictive of real life difficulties.

AS: And what's your experience of using this tool with patients?

BW: Well my finding is that most patients actually enjoy doing the test, they're not as threatened by it as some other tests; they can see the sense in it, it feels like a memory test. So as well as other things it has face validity. It measure things similar to what they're going to experience in everyday life. Other memory tests are often so different from everyday life that you find patients saying something like "well I never need to remember anything like that" or "well I couldn't have done that before I was ill / before my accident or illness or injury". They don't say that about the RBMT because it looks like what they think a memory test should be...

AS: ...it's a lot more meaningful too them...

BW: ...it is and that will enhance motivation I think.

AS: And then how is the test useful for rehabilitation?

BW: Well it helps us to understand patient's strengths and weaknesses. For example, some people only have problems with the prospective memory items - remembering to do something, or only have problems with the visual or the verbal items, and if we see that pattern it's those that we can target in rehabilitation.

And it also helps patients to recognise their own problems for themselves. They're more likely to accept it if they have problems on a test like the RBMT. If they fail tests that are like real life tasks and they know they need to remember these things in real life, it can heighten their awareness and improve their motivation. We need to other things in rehab but I think the Rivermead is a good starting point.

AS: Well thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today, it sounds like a very exciting test.

BW: Well it's my pleasure.

AS: ...and we look forward to seeing it when it comes out and using it.

BW: Thank you very much.

AS: Thank you Barbara.