Understanding anorexia nervosa

Psychologist Siew Soon presents research in London
Siew’s study confirmed the relationship between the relentless need for control, perfectionism, low self-esteem, and the pathological drive for thinness in individuals with anorexia nervosa. “When everything in their lives felt out of control they fixated on eating and weight because that provided reliable and immediate feedback of success through weight-loss,” Siew said.

“The findings suggest that treatment for anorexia nervosa should target the need for control, which was shown to be a key factor keeping patients trapped in the disorder.”

Siew presented her findings at the Australia and New Zealand Academy of Eating Disorders Conference in 2012, and received the Peter Beumont Young Investigators Award.

“I was really encouraged that people received the research well and found it useful,” she said.

Siew’s research also found the strong need for control extended to thinking in individuals with anorexia nervosa. “Patients with anorexia nervosa reported a significantly higher level of dysfunctional metacognitions, simply described as thinking about thinking. “The most prominent metacognitions related to controlling their thoughts; they believed if they lost control of their thoughts it was catastrophic, dangerous, or indicated they were losing their minds.”

Siew presented her paper Dysfunctional Metacognitions in Individuals with Anorexia Nervosa, Dieters and Non-Dieters at the London International Eating Disorders Conference in March.

The paper suggests that Metacognitive Therapy, found effective in the treatment of generalised anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and mood disorders, may be useful in treating anorexia nervosa.

“I’m also working on journal articles for publication, to get the word out about what we’ve found,” she said.

By Kellie Furey