**Supplementary material**

History of Problem

As a young boy Nick remembers having an uncontrollable urge to perform a ritual of movements in a set pattern of threes with his hands touching always the same parts of his body; nose, elbows and knees. Complying with these urges resulted in punishments by his father. Nick is not sure why and how but this urge gradually passed. He worked as a paperboy for some time and remembers liking to read the headlines as he walked along the streets of London. Murder trials frequently made headlines, as did the hangings after the guilty verdicts. He remembers developing this fear that one day he would unwillingly commit murder and hang. At the time he did not understand this fear and it worried him terribly and he felt he could not share this with anyone. This fear haunted him for years and he kept it secret from everyone. Nick left school when he was 15 with no qualifications. He went to sea as a deck boy and travelled the world and enjoyed the sea life. However, it was there at sea that his fears of contamination really began. As a young man he had never heard much about homosexuality (which was illegal in those days) but at sea anything went and a few of the stewards on board would dress up as women. Initially, Nick treated this just as part of the “colourful life of being at sea”, but after few voyages he started to worry that he might catch whatever it was that made them want to be women. This worry started to get worse and worse until one day in his early twenties whilst on leave at home he had a bonfire in the garden of many of his clothes, seamen’s books, and papers; quickly following that he gave up the sea. Again, he told no one about his fears. From then on, cleanliness started to become an obsession and he started washing obsessively every day. Nick accepted that this was how his life was going to be and he felt he could not change it. When Nick was 23 years old (mid 1950s) his OCD took a turn for the worse. He decided to seek professional help and was admitted to a psychiatric hospital in London for 7 months. He said:

###### “…there was plenty of electrical treatment going on, on our ward. Fortunately I was not given that. Stories of Lobotomies abounded. We were at least taken out, once a week, to have tea and cake. I looked forward to that. Otherwise I just read and helped the nurses push patients around. We also played records and board games. Eventually I was just discharged. Fortunately non the worse but no better either.”

Life carried on and in 1957, Nick started working for the postal service and got married. For the first time in his life he felt that he had someone to talk to about his OCD – this quickly turned into excessive reassurance seeking regarding his contamination fears and not surprisingly his OCD grew stronger. At that time, fear of nuclear war was in the air and the campaign for nuclear disarmament was founded. Then suddenly Nick realised that he was starting to worry about nuclear war and its aftermath of radiation. One day he trod on his watch, which had fallen on the floor indoors. He broke the glass. In those days, watches were luminous and Nick had read somewhere that luminous paint was radioactive so the same must apply to watches. He panicked. He washed the carpet, threw away the bucket and left it at that. However, the ‘OCD bully’ kept on and on and on. He could not sleep. He could not concentrate on work, and went backwards fast. In the end he threw the carpet away, in spite of the cost. This upset his partner greatly – they had a small baby at that time – and financially things were tight. Nick remembers:

######  “Suddenly I had a new great worry and fear...Radiation! It quickly increased in strength. I feared all watches, could not walk past a watch shop without crossing the road if I didn’t I had to find puddles to walk in to decontaminate my shoes. I sat on people’s right hand side on transport as nine out of ten people wear their watch on the left wrist. Soon almost everything green was luminous or could be. Avoidance and washing became my life. It became intolerable and I went back into the hospital.”

The year was 1970 and treatment had changed somewhat since he was last admitted. This time, Nick was helped to confront his fears with some success, but in hindsight he feels the treatment course was too short and quickly after discharge he started again washing and throwing things away. He could no longer work, and as a result he was put on sick leave.

In the 1980’s, AIDS appeared and at that time it was a death sentence for anyone who caught it. Thus, for Nick, blood became his new great worry, dislodging radiation to a back seat. Life got increasingly difficult and even more so when the Chernobyl nuclear disaster happened. That brought back and strengthened his radiation fears. He tried to carry on working but soon found it impossible. His manager decided to give him a medical retirement and he returned back to the hospital around the late 1980s and this time was offered Exposure Response Prevention (ERP). The treatment helped and life settled down a bit, but only for a very short time and the OCD quickly returned. In his own words, Nick said:

###### “I washed, had good days, bad days and very bad days, but life went on. The worry, the avoidance and the washing became part of it, there was no other way, it was my life, but there were good things too; my home life was happy. My partner was as always understanding and kind and my girls were growing up.”

Following discharge, Nick started working again. Throughout the 1990’s and the decade following millennium he continued to struggle with his OCD. In 2010, after having battled OCD for almost seven decades, he was referred by his general practitioner for CBT. After finished twelve sessions of CBT, Nick felt better and left the treatment feeling good and confident. Unfortunately, history repeated itself and he was quickly washing again. He said:

###### “I just started to slip back into my bad old ways; I was soon back at the sink, worrying, washing and all the other horrible things even though I knew it was wrong. I just wanted peace of mind; CBT might have been the way but I just could not do it.”

Nick carried on for the next two years until he sought further CBT (12 sessions in total) in 2012 with a more experienced therapist. Nick found the treatment to be helpful but before he knew he had slipped back:

###### “I was on my own again - just me and the bully. I knew so well how strong he can be, convincing, persistent, always there, never missing a chance to get back in. He never forgets and he never sleeps. He sits on your shoulder and never goes away.”

At this point in time it was decided to refer Nick again for CBT.