



## Sarah Key's Problem Backs Masterclasses (UK)

### ***Ever wished you were better with backs?***

- Are you confident treating backs?
- Are you on shaky ground explaining what is wrong and how to put it right?
- Do you feel disempowered by the cry for evidence-based therapy?
- Do you know what you're doing, asking patients to help treat themselves?

Acclaimed physiotherapist Sarah Key MVO presents a unique back care model for post graduate therapists. From the very first lecture, she provides bedrock scientific data, with intensely practical 'shop floor' analysis and clinical reasoning with highly effective treatment protocols. Sarah Key Masterclasses consist of Stage 1, 2 and 3 over a period of several months. Selected students are invited to participate in Stage 4 as 'Teacher Training Programs'.

Sarah shares her huge body of knowledge from the basics forward, including her working hypothesis to explain 'non-specific low back pain of unknown aetiology' – an unexplained conundrum that leaves all therapists in the lurch. Her concept enlightens through easy-to-understand information about fundamental anatomy, physiology, biomechanics and pathology -- and how this can be harnessed to provide 'effective therapy'.

The Sarah Key Method makes sense. In a therapy world where practitioners shop around from course to course, trying to make use of scraps of unrelated information, the Sarah Key Method provides a cogent, logical concept that will change your life! Sarah Key says, "if you're going from course to course to pick up another tool for the toolkit, you simply don't understand the machinery!" Sarah's main aim is to provide knowledge for 'good therapy'.

The Sarah Key Method explains how healthy backs work and how simple linkage problems can become complex, why it happens and how you deal with the various stages of breakdown. Sarah Key's model is based on 40 years of distilled clinical experience. Her evidence base, drawn from over 400 research papers, has been selected for the specific purpose of providing *the science behind the method*, to make therapy more effective and fast working. She wants to empower therapists and patients alike.



Broadly speaking, Sarah's approach falls into four specific areas:

- The 5 stages of breakdown of a lumbar motion segment
- Pressure Change Therapy [PCT] including the use of the BackBlock
- More effective diagnosis with the hands
- More effective spinal mobilisation using the heel of the foot

## ***What does Stage 1 Masterclass Cover?***

Stage 1 includes the following over a 3 day period:

- Powerpoint Lectures on 'The 5 stages of breakdown of a spinal segment'
- Specific focus on diagnostic up-skilling through palpation
- Practical mobilising techniques and their rationale
- Intensive in vivo Case Studies with patients
- PowerPoint Discussions
- Therapy Class to show 'pressure change therapy' [PCT] of lumbar spine
- Lifelong access to online support via Sarah Key Masterclass Forums

### ***Synopsis of Theory Lectures:***

A well-hydrated intervertebral disc is the critical core component of the lumbar motion segment. The main load bearing part of the disc is a ball-of-fluid nucleus contained by the mid/inner annulus wrapped around it. By contrast, the outer annulus is like a tensile 'skin' that holds the segments together, complemented by the thrusting apart pressure of the water within the disc. Thus, the outer annulus is more like a ligament. It is more vascularised and innervated, and because it is more metabolically active, is more able to repair.

Proteoglycans is the all-important X-factor that holds water within a disc. Optimum disc hydration creates a high intradiscal pressure, thus providing spinal mobility at low load and stability at high load. Loss of proteoglycans is one of the first signs of disc degeneration, resulting in gradual loss of intradiscal pressure and disc height. As the disc dehydrates and degeneration picks up, load is transferred from the nucleus to the annulus. As the disc progressively thins, load is also borne by the facet joints. Both of these two pre-pathological states can cause pain.

Impaired disc nutrition has long been held the main cause of disc degeneration. Nutrition is directly related to fluid traffic in and out of discs. Sarah Key's therapeutic concept focuses on improving function of the two main 'engines' of disc nutrition through pressure changes which augment fluid flow and stimulate proteoglycans synthesis.

### ***Synopsis of Discussion Lectures:***

Activities and circumstances that bear a great influence on back behaviour are discussed with their relevance to therapy. 'Posture', 'Sitting' and 'Bending' are all-important concepts



and must be understood from a biomechanical basis. Sarah Key says, “If you understand the biomechanics you know what you’re doing.” [This has particular significance to ‘Lifting’ discussed in Stage 2.]

The role of ‘decompression’ is particularly significant for the lumbar spine, which bears greater super-incumbent load.

### ***Synopsis of Practical Sessions:***

Sarah looks at and palpates the spines of all the delegates on the Stage 1 course and teaches the refining of manual techniques for diagnostics, before moving on to teaching how to mobilise with the heel.

Two things to say about using the heel is that patients are always surprised that it doesn’t feel heavy [Sarah says that patients are never resistant to the heel – only medical people!] and therapists are astonished that it is so easy and how much they can feel. Skill upgrading is usually rapid with careful emphasis on pressures and rhythm. Best practice protocols are assiduously observed, with a high priority on patient comfort.



### ***In vivo Case Studies of patients:***

Morning lectures are followed by students observing Sarah treating a patient she has never seen before. Delegates observe history taking, spinal movement analysis, palpation with the hands, neurological exam [when relevant], discussing the scans, clinical reasoning and arrival at diagnosis. Students then observe Sarah mobilising the patient’s spine with her heel, providing suitable home exercises in addition to the Pressure Change Therapy regime and finally, hear Sarah’s written summary to the patient.

Seeing patients treated in real time in a clinical setting makes it possible to canvas many issues and manifestations typical of bad back management in a way you could never learn in a classroom. The Sarah Key approach makes sense. It feels physically agreeable, is dynamic, encouraging and empowering -- to both therapist and patient.

### ***Decompression ‘Pressure Change Therapy’ [PCT] Classes***

All therapists are provided with a BackBlock and learn the very important 3-step regimen they will implement with all their patients. The procedures, demonstrated in class format, show how to alleviate the ever-present forces of segmental compression, usually caused by sitting [and in some instances by muscle spasm]. The Pressure Change Therapy regime also works on the posterior annulus to encourage repair and strengthens the lower abdominal muscles to improve spinal support.



Stages 2 and 3 of Sarah Key's Masterclasses focus on creating exceptional quality therapists who are more akin to healers than technicians. Stage 2 and Stage 3 continue refining the use of the heel and also cover wider issues, such as the pitfalls of core stability training, the ill-effects of uncontrolled muscle spasm, the role of confidence begot of understanding, the uses of medication, the recognition of patterned pain responses and the importance of fear avoidance. Stage 2 also covers the treatment of specific spinal disorders [scoliosis, spondylolisthesis, stenosis, lumbarisation, sacralisation etc].

**Masterclass Forums:** Accredited course graduates receive a password to access ongoing interactive support and discussion through [www.sarahkey.com](http://www.sarahkey.com). This provides automatic updates and professional contact for problem solving.

***Here's what one of Sarah's recent patients said about her Sarah Key treatment:***

*"This time last year I was crippled with pain, swallowing pills and only existing on basic function mode with three lively children to look after. I had tried everything to no avail. Things changed, however, when I met Sarah Key. I was astonished by the effectiveness of her treatment regimen! I really feel she's given me back my life. We need to clone her and make her skill base accessible to everyone. It is extraordinary what she does and the way in which she does it. I have yet to meet anyone who understands the back the way Sarah does. She goes right to the cause. I now have everything I need to look after my own back."*

***Here's what a former course participant said about the course:***

*"Participating in this course has radically changed the way I now treat patients with back pain. It has helped me treat patients and also helped me to achieve outstanding results. By using Sarah Key's treatment techniques to manage back pain, not only do I feel problems are arrested, I see them reversed! The concept makes it possible to dissipate pain by targeting the root cause of most spinal disorders: disc thinning and degeneration secondary to a stiff spinal segment."*

*Sarah has progressed spinal mobilisation through her own unique techniques – primarily using the foot as a tool. The broader surface delivers the force more gently: much kinder than a physio's thumbs! Also integral to her technique is the 'BackBlock, which patients take home. This simple, inexpensive device is the way patients manage their own on-going rehabilitation. As therapists, we exert great forces through our wrists and thumbs, which suffer as a result. By contrast, using the foot enables us to take a joint effortlessly to end of range with very gentle and comfortable, oscillatory movements."*



**Here's what Dr. Michael Dixon, Chairman, NHS Alliance had to say:**

*"Sarah Key's theories and treatment of back and joint pain are highly original and effective in equal measure. They provide a means of relieving suffering, preventing ongoing pathology and reducing the need for future operative intervention. Indeed, she represents the sustainable approach towards back pain and joint disease, which patients and health services in the 21st century so desperately need.*

*Sarah represents an integrated approach that involves both the physiotherapist and the patient himself/herself in an ongoing therapy to reduce current problems and prevent future ones".*

## **Course Trainers**

**Sarah Key** MVO, Dip Phys SRP MCSP is the author of the popular books '**The Back Sufferers' Bible**', '**Back in Action**' and the soon to be re-released '**The Body in Action**'.

Sarah is an Australian physiotherapist with an international reputation for treating problem backs. Over her years in clinical practice she has developed a working hypothesis comprising a rational blend of clinical experience and cutting edge evidence-based theory. She bases her concept on a solid foundation of spinal biomechanics and pathological processes, to provide the clinical reasoning behind her unusual treatment techniques.

The primary authors of Sarah's source material are Michael Adams, Associate Professor of Anatomy at Bristol University, UK and Nikolai Bogduk, Faculty of Medicine, Newcastle University, New South Wales, although she uses over 400 other papers to help throw light on the complexity of understanding and managing low back pain.

Her working hypothesis explains the '**5 Stages of Spinal Breakdown**' as they manifest in a linear progression through the five distinctly tangible disorders (stiff spinal segment, facet joint arthropathy, acute locked back, prolapsed intervertebral disc, unstable spinal segment), and this information underpins her '*whole back care*' concept.

## **Course Venues**

The course will be held in The Orchard Room at Highgrove House in Gloucestershire, the estate of HRH The Prince of Wales. Places are limited and the course is non-residential. Accommodation details of B&Bs and hotels in the nearby village of Tetbury will be provided upon request. Road and rail links are excellent. It takes about one and a half hours by train from London. The nearest Airport is Bristol which is about 45 mins away by car.

## **When is the next course?**

Monday 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2010



### ***What does the course cost?***

£495 which includes course manual, a BackBlock and a copy of 'The Back Sufferers' Bible'.

### ***Who do I Contact?***

For further information or queries please contact:

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### ***Here's what some participants had to say:***

#### **Testimonials from UK SKMC May, 2009**

"I want to thank you for a fantastic week. Despite the full and busy days I feel energized and ready to put to practice all that I have learned over the course. I already feel more confident and ready to treat some of those challenging backs having a better understanding and clearer picture of what is going on and how to explain what is happening to my patients."

#### **Testimonials from UK SKMC October, 2008**

"Excellent course with wide amount of evidence based practice to support the theories. Makes backs much simpler - pity this model is not taught to undergraduate students - it would make backs less daunting when you first qualify. Can't wait to get back to work and try out and develop new skills"

"Fantastic course. It will totally transform your understanding of how spinal breakdown occurs and empower you to make a real difference. To me, this is 'the physiotherapy' I signed up for."

#### **Testimonials from UK SKMC May, 2008**

"I really enjoyed the course, I thought what Sarah had to say was of great value to the profession and I think that her message is one that needs to be spread far and wide."

"Sarah Key's foot techniques are really good and very easy for any decent therapist to pick up.

They are:

Comfortable and relaxing for the Therapist;

No sore hands/OA thumbs/stiff back/stiff necks;

Patients love it;

Can apply greater force comfortably;

Sensation through the feet is greater than hands so you can feel the bony points much easier;



Much easier to get at L5 and the facets as you tilt the pelvis backward with your anchor foot, often difficult to get at this area with hands.”

### **Course review UK**

“The sight of my husband clutching the roof rack of our car unable to move, his back having ‘gone’ while getting my Christmas bottle of Amarulla out of the car made me decide that 2006 was going to be the year that I learnt more about treating back pain.

Sarah Key’s Masterclass seemed to fulfil my criteria and I booked myself onto the 4 day course at Highgrove, a beautiful setting for a course.

The course was a mixture of theory and practical and a brave delegation of patients who were treated over the last 3 days although there was, as always, almost enough going on in our own backs to treat. Mine still feels wonderful thanks!

Sarah has developed a working hypothesis of the 5 stages of spinal breakdown, this was explained in detail over the course and I now feel able to explain to most patients where their pain is coming from and more importantly what we can do together to treat it and even start to reverse the breakdown.

Treatment techniques use hands and your feet, somewhat different but it saves your thumbs, the patients find it comfortable and so often now I hear my patients say that ‘That is my pain, that is where it is’.

I had warned a couple of my beefy young male patients that I was doing the course so that when I went back to work the following week they were there ready for me to gently trample on their backs, with great results.

We were taught a great package of exercises mostly based on yoga stretches and positions and we all had a copy of Sarah’s book The back sufferers Bible which also explains the 5 stages and has comprehensive exercise routines for patients to follow.

Sarah is a great teacher and very experienced and passionate clinician, She is very entertaining and a little controversial,(wait for the lifting lecture) which I found quite inspiring and amusing!!!! As with all courses you need to approach it with an open mind. After the course you have access to a forum on Sarah’s website, any problems or queries that you have are posted on the forum for Fellow delegates and usually Sarah to respond too I have found this so helpful in keeping my confidence with the method and solving the odd problem patient.

Sarah is generous with her time and materials and I can honestly say that this course above all others has influenced my practice and given me tools (well a block of wood and my feet) to help treat back pain, I actually look forward to seeing back pain patients now.! Ps Husband much better, recovered from his acute locked back and lying on his back block daily in front of Neighbours!”

### **Testimonials from Sydney SKMC April, 2010**

"I cannot recommend this course enough. I felt I have learnt more about lower back anatomy, pathology and treatment in the last 3 days than I learnt at uni and 3 years of physio. Sarah is a great teacher and I found this course very relevant and practical. I hope to look forward to doing the Stage 2 and Stage 3 courses and I'd love to take part in the back week. I cannot thank Sarah enough!"

"Awesome course- Best one yet! It made sense"



"This course was fantastic for making us think about what we have known in the past but it made so much more sense and became so simplified in my mind. I'm now so excited to treat backs!"

### **Testimonials from Sydney SKMC August, 2009**

"I was sold in the first 10 minutes when I was informed this was not going to be 'another tool for the tool box'. It was already too full of ineffective tools!!"

" After years of feeling I could not provide an adequate explanation to patients, I now feel my own understanding is much clearer which will allow me to pass on a clearer explanation to patients. I'm so glad another physio has sought to find a better explanation and theoretical picture of back pathology and is so willing to pass on her knowledge."

" Sarah makes the complex beautifully simple. I love her approach and her willingness to be so honest and transparent with her clinical reasoning. It has been a real privilege to see up close exactly how it all works and to have the priceless opportunity to have feedback on our own techniques. It was a fabulous course and I highly recommend it to all practitioners. ( You are missing out on a gem if you don't!!)"

" This is a theory that sheds light on so many areas of confusion that are reinforced by university and conventional physio. Hopefully "non specific lower back pain" will become a thing of the past. The mobilisation method is extremely comfortable and surprisingly easy to do."

### **Testimonials from Sydney SKMC February, 2009**

" Sarah Key's theory of spinal breakdown and proposal for treatment is logical, fascinating and is based on research and evidence rather than hearsay and presumption- as many physiotherapy treatments are. I think she is doing important work to open physiotherapists eyes to how poorly we understand back pain. I found this course extremely practical and educational and Sarah's willingness to challenge traditions of physiotherapy, by applying evidence in her treatment, inspiring."

" A convergence of theory and practice, a real confidence builder"



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