

News



Sophie Goodchild, Health Editor
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Sir Antony Sher told today how treatment at a London clinic helped him beat his addiction to cocaine.

The award-winning actor revealed he still has therapy once a week at **Capio Nightingale** hospital in Marylebone.

He has gone public about his struggle in the hope that more people will seek professional help. The treatment is a form of psychotherapy that helps patients "unlock" problems through painting and drawing.

This week the first exhibition of work by Capio Nightingale patients who have completed the treatment was unveiled at the hospital in Lisson Grove, which has treated **Amy Winehouse** and **Pete Doherty**.

They include a picture by Sir Antony — an accomplished artist — at the height of his cocaine habit. The sketch is of a naked man hunched over a broken pane of glass snorting up the shards.

"Anyone who has checked into one of these [clinics] will know you feel very scared," he said. "The group I was in was sent to the art room for something I'd not heard about, which was art therapy. For the first time, I felt a sense of security — at school the art room was a place of comfort and safety. The picture I did on the very first morning was of a naked man leaning on a broken mirror.

"I didn't know where this had come from, but it could be read that it showed how dangerous cocaine is. The figure of the man is very hunky and sexy. That's how I felt on cocaine — that's what's so seductive about it."

The work was painted during his first therapy session, after he checked in for three weeks of rehab in 1996.

It followed nearly 20 years of cocaine use which escalated from recreational to "frantic". At his peak, Sir Antony was snorting two grams a weekend and suffering "coke-overs" — drug-induced hangovers.

He started taking the substance at social events, and said it gave him extra confidence, turning a shy individual into the life of the party.

"I've been clean for 13 years but I still do art therapy once a week," he added. "It should be made more widely available."

Sir Antony, 60, said art therapy also helped him a few years ago when he developed stage fright — just at the time he was receiving critical acclaim for his performances with the **Royal Shakespeare Company**.

"[Stage fright] was becoming a real problem although no one would have ever known," he said. "I was seriously thinking about giving up acting."



Pic: Nigel Howard

Intense: Sir Antony Sher with his work created while doing art therapy



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