Psychotherapy: Skills and Resilience Through Self-Knowledge

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Psychotherapy
Skills and Resilience Through Self-Knowledge

University of Vermont Family Medicine - Colchester

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In 2010, ~20% of all primary care office visits were mental health-related.¹

A 2006 study in *J Gen Intern Med* showed that out of 298 visits to primary care offices by SPs portraying depressive symptoms, only 36% resulted in a referral to a mental health professional, whether to a psychiatrist, clinical psychologist, social worker, or counselor.²

Meta-analyses have shown that psychotherapy and SSRIs are comparably effective for treating Major Depressive Disorder, but the effects of psychotherapy last after completing treatment, while the effects of SSRIs generally diminish after stopping treatment.³

The UVM Family Medicine - Colchester site is introducing PHQ-2 depression screening for every adolescent visit this fall.

I sought to create a resource about psychotherapy to give to patients who screen positive.
Cost Considerations

Costs to society:

- Serious mental health disorders cost America at least $193.2 billion dollars in lost earnings each year.\(^4\)
- Suicide is the 10\(^{th}\) leading cause of death in America, and the 2\(^{nd}\) leading cause of death among people aged 15-24.\(^4\)

Treatment affordability considerations:

- Vermont Medicaid (Green Mountain Care) provides coverage for visits to the Community Mental Health Center, mental health counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists.\(^5\)
- Medicare Part B covers 80% of mental healthcare visits for approved providers.\(^6\)
I spoke with Robert Hall and Julie Pastore, guidance counselors at Colchester High School, to get their perspectives on teenage mental health and general knowledge about what therapy is. Their perspectives:

- Anxiety is on the rise in high schoolers; depression rates seem about constant.
- There is a general lack of understanding about what therapy is and a stigma/reluctance towards seeking it out.
- Upper-middle class families tend to have the resources to seek mental help for their children if necessary. Families of lower socioeconomic status may not even know where to turn, or what resources exist.

I also spoke with Angela Paoli, LICSW to get her perspective on the usefulness of the resource I developed. Her perspective:

- A useful resource would be able to break down and describe different types of therapies for patients.
I developed a pamphlet explaining what psychotherapy is, describing different styles of therapy, and encouraging patients that they can ask their primary care provider (PCP) for a referral to a therapist.

While this was designed with adolescent visits in mind, the resource is broadly applicable to adult patients as well.
Results

Psychotherapy

What is Psychotherapy?

Stressed? SADLY STRUGGLING?
Life presents challenges at all stages. Sometimes you find yourself navigating these challenges with new, coping and feeling accomplished. Other times, the mere prospect of facing those challenges leaves you feeling anxious, stressed out, scared, or overwhelmed. Psychotherapy is the process of working with a licensed mental health professional to address your fears, concerns, stressors, and emotional difficulties.

Therapy teaches you to channel distressing feelings into productive, self-supporting responses.

There are many different types of psychotherapy, ranging from short-term, problem-focused therapy lasting a few weeks to classical psychoanalysis lasting years. Therapists have different training and different styles, and it is important to find a therapist whose style works for you.

Just as physicians help you maintain your physical health, therapists can help you take care of your mental and emotional health, an important part of your overall wellness.

Types of Therapies

There are many therapeutic modalities. Here are three of the most commonly practiced:

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: Helps you build awareness of how your thoughts connect with feelings. By becoming aware of your thoughts, you can change emotions, and even behavior.
- Good for: Anxiety, Depression, Eating Disorders, PTSD, OCD, Addiction
- Psychodynamic Therapy: Explores how unconscious beliefs and thought patterns from early experiences affect your current behaviors and emotions.
- Good for: Anxiety, OCD, Phobia
- Trauma-Focused Therapy: This therapy helps you process traumatic memories. Includes Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy and Exposure Therapy.
- Good for: PTSD, Addiction, Phobia

Therapists may use a combination of therapies. More than one type of therapy may work for you.

Who can help me?

A variety of mental health professionals can provide therapy, including:

- Marriage and Family Therapists (MFT)
- Mental Health Counselors (MHCM)
- Social Workers (LCSW)
- Psychologists (PhD, PsyD)
- Psychiatrists (M.D.)

Therapy can help with:

Anxiety, depression, OCD, PTSD, phobias, substance use, relationship concerns, managing life stressors, and other mental health issues.

Common Misconceptions

"No one can truly understand my problems for me."

- The role of the therapist is not to give you the answers to life's challenges. The role of the therapist is to guide you toward self-awareness and provide tools to address your problems in a productive way that is in line with your values.
- "You have to learn to 'go' to therapy."

- Anyone who is looking for tools to better cope with challenges in their lives can go to therapy. Just like physical therapy teaches you proper techniques for physical exercise, psychotherapy teaches you how to manage strong emotions and difficult thoughts in a self-supportive way.
- "Therapy is not an effective medication.

- Studies have shown that cognitive therapy is as effective as medication for treating depression and that for many, a combination of medication and therapy works better than medication alone. Plus, the effects of medications often stop once you stop taking them, while the skills you learn in therapy can last a lifetime."

How do I find a therapist?

At the University of Vermont Medical Center, we have adopted the medical home model. Your primary care provider will be happy to offer you a referral to a trained therapist to meet your mental healthcare needs.
Effectiveness and Limitations

Effectiveness:
- This tool aims to provide a user-friendly, easy-to-understand, and inviting description of therapy and how it works.
- Several reviewers confirmed that this tool addresses a number of the questions/preconceived notions that the target population may have:
  - Alicia Jacobs, MD: Family Physician
  - Elizabeth Pierson, MD: Psychiatrist
  - Karen Lewicki, MD: PGY-1 Psychiatry Resident
  - Angela Paoli, LICSW
  - Robert Hall, High School Guidance Counselor
  - Julie Pastore, High School Guidance Counselor

Limitations:
- As a pilot tool, its usefulness is unverified.
- The tool directs patients to their PCP for referrals to a therapist, in keeping with the Patient Centered Medical Home model. The next step is to ensure PCP familiarity with a variety of therapists in the area.
Once the pamphlet has been introduced to patients, we could provide a qualitative survey in the waiting room –
- Have you ever considered therapy before?
- What impression did this pamphlet make on you?
- Does this make you more, less, or as likely to seek therapy?
- What suggestions do you have?

Create and maintain of a database of therapists in the area

Foster of a culture of communication between PCPs and therapists, perhaps by coordinating a formal outreach effort to local therapists by UVM
References

Presentation References:


Pamphlet Bibliography:


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