



e-Psychotherapy: the next generation of treatments

The uses, advantages and implications of psychotherapy and web technology

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1	Contents		
1	Contents	2	
2	Introduction	3	
2.1	Mission Statement	3	
2.2	Declaration of interests	3	
3	Abstract	4	
4	e-Psychotherapy: the next generation of treatments	5	5
4.1	Emotional distress	5	
4.2	Therapies	5	
4.2.1	The choice of therapies	5	
4.3	Evolution of therapies	6	
4.4	Limitations of conventional therapies	7	
5	e-Psychotherapy on the web - the next generation of therapies	9	
5.1	Advantages of e-Psychotherapy	9	
5.2	The implications of e-Psychotherapy	10	
6	Summary	11	

2 Introduction

2.1 Mission Statement

To introduce the next generation of psychotherapeutic techniques; e-Psychotherapy.

To describe the advantages and implications of using e-Psychotherapy.

Increase adherence and decrease attrition in the utilization of medications

2.2 Declaration of interests

The author of this paper, Dr. Michael Benjamin, is the owner of myRay

3 Abstract

Emotional distress is unlike any other complaint because the sufferer diagnoses it.

There are two modes of treatment: medication and psychotherapy. The accepted treatment of choice is both medication and psychotherapy together. The demand for treatment is vast. Because of a shortage of suitably qualified therapists, most sufferers receive medication.

Where medication is used, it is associated with low compliance. This causes poor client satisfaction and a renewed search for a better solution. Psychotherapy has developed popular therapies that are educational in nature.

The widely used Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) has been computerized and found to be as effective as any other therapy in present use. It is now possible to mesh the psychotherapies that are educational in nature with the advances made in e-Learning. (Presentation, Immediacy, Openness, Interactivity, Data Storage, Tracking and Security) This white paper lays down the blueprint for e-Psychotherapy. The specifications cover:

- Professional acceptability
- User friendliness
- Personalization
- Client safety
- Data security
- Data management

e-Psychotherapy has the following advantages:

- Efficiency
- Reliability
- Convenience
- Intimacy
- Increase utilization of medication
- Analysis of results

e-Psychotherapy, by being non labor intensive, can greatly reduce the cost of delivery. e-Psychotherapy will probably increase the use of medication, leading to savings in the costs of therapy.

4 e-Psychotherapy: the next generation of treatments

4.1 Emotional distress

Emotional distress is the collective name for all the negative emotions that hinder the feeling of well-being. These emotions include: depression, sadness, anxiety, panic attacks, anger and stress.

It is impossible to measure any kind of emotional distress objectively. Unlike other illnesses, there are no real measurable parameters.

4.2 Therapies

Therapies cause change. Therapies aim to change the designated cause of emotional distress.

Any person who desires to negate emotional distress is considered a suitable candidate for therapy. In my experience no sufferer of emotional distress is denied therapy. The limiting factors are the awareness of the need for help and the availability of treatment.

4.2.1 The choice of therapies

There are three possible therapeutic interventions:

- Medication
- Psychotherapy
- A combination of both

Medication should be chosen when either:

- The emotional distress is disproportionate. It is almost as if there is an internal error in the recording of the emotion. It is associated with a decrease in the ability to function. Medication attempts to correct the imbalance.
- Psychotherapy is not available, not suitable or is declined by the sufferer.
- There is a diminution of functioning
- There is a diminution in the quality of life

Psychotherapy is chosen when:

- The emotional distress is proportionate to the situation, but the situation consists of a repetitive series of inappropriate or inadequate responses. It is almost as if the same mistakes are inevitably repeated. It is associated with limited insight.

- Emotional distress can be reduced by:

Learning relaxation techniques.

Learning to cope with stress.

Understanding the causes and consequences of one's behavior and thoughts.

Understanding the cause and consequence of one's emotions.

In my experience anyone receiving medication also benefits from psychotherapy. Generally speaking, patients in psychotherapy do not gain any added benefit from medication.

4.3 Evolution of therapies

Medication and psychotherapy are constantly changing.

The use of medication is based on the notion of chemical imbalance. The chemical imbalance causes the emotional distress. The theory suggests that, if the imbalance can be corrected, then the emotional distress will be remedied. Research into imbalance is vast and expensive; the knowledge gained is constantly expanding. A continuing increase in understanding creates new generations of medications.

Psychotherapy has evolved from a dynamic form to a behavioral one. The supposed cause has shifted from early experiences to the way we think or behave. The emphasis of therapy has shifted from understanding why, to learning how; from dealing with why we feel to what we think.

Behavioral therapies are goal and method orientated. They have clearly defined aims, goals, means and a timetable. There is an explicit understanding or contract, between the therapist and the patient. Put very simply, behavioral therapy is now mainly an educational process. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is even more so.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is the most practiced form of psychotherapy today. It is the most used and most efficient treatment for emotional distress. The essence of behavioral therapy and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is the ability to educate.

Research shows that Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is as effective as any other psychotherapy. Research has shown conclusively that cognitive behavioral therapy can be given on a computer with no loss in effectiveness.

4.4 Limitations of conventional therapies

All forms of conventional therapy have limitations: Delivery:

- Compliance rates are less than fifty percent in both medication and psychotherapy. In other words, most sufferers' needs are not met. Because of attrition and compliance the full benefits are not attained.
- Public sector provision cannot meet the demand for psychotherapy. The waiting lists are often long.
- As a result, sufferers are offered.
- Clinical expertise is lower in the public sector than in the private sector.
- The public sector will try to limit usage of more expensive and newer but more effective drugs.

Effectiveness:

- A majority of sufferers report a failure to achieve full relief.
- Most compliant medication takers will undergo relapse or report that they are not symptom free.
- The findings for psychotherapy are better but the evaluation seems to be less stringent.

Side Effects:

Initially many medication users report:

- Sexual dysfunction
- Weight gain
- Difficulties in stopping the medication
- Agitation and aggressive behavior

As compliance is unsatisfactory a lot of patients will not experience the diminution of side effects and the positive improvements gained by steady and prolonged use.

With psychotherapy there are far fewer unwanted effects.

Cost Containment:

- The time needed for therapy is uncertain.
- Therapy can be long term especially in the case of medication.
- Psychotherapy is labor intensive and expensive.
- Non compliance compounds the expense.

The therapies use the web in a limited manner. In my opinion these therapies do not fully utilize the potential of the web.

The web is devoted to mainly supplying information about therapy but not giving therapy. There is no quality or professional control whatsoever. The web mainly deals with awareness and acquisition. The public can:

- find information about medication and therapists
- acquire knowledge about medications.
- buy medications
- acquire offline services such as CD or books
- acquire online interventions
- acquire therapies via email

Support:

Support groups are common and may be useful. They generally have no professional supervision.

5 e-Psychotherapy on the web - the next generation of therapies

The proposed blueprint of web based therapy places emphasis on the following assumptions:

- e-learning is at the cutting edge of web technology. It harnesses the web's advantages of presentation skills, interactivity, data management, tracking and security.
- Only accepted professional therapies are used. The therapies are flexible enough to be presented as part of an e-learning format.
- Overcomes or minimizes the problems seen in present therapies. It offers the best options, with minimal or no unwanted effects. It is always available.
- The user is never at risk. The user is tested on entry and at least once weekly. The test ascertains e-Psychotherapy's suitability.
- User privacy is closely guarded.
- All sections have full explanations and instructions with professional presentation.
- The user provides and receives feedback. The user's input is the main tool. The e-Psychotherapy interventions are built round and follow on from the user's input.
- The user is offered a personalized program but is free to select any particular part. The user can use and study his/her examples as they occur.
- The user can use his/her data to observe traits and trends in his/her behavior or thinking. The user can plot his/her own progress and plan future steps.

5.1 Advantages of e-Psychotherapy

- e-Psychotherapy is as effective as conventional therapy.
- e-Psychotherapy enhances medication by preventing attrition and increasing adherence.
- People find it easier to be open and intimate when sitting in front of a computer screen.
- The users can choose their own pace and depth of analysis.
- The users can monitor and analyze in depth all their reactions and answers. This is a powerful learning tool.
- The users can choose how often and when they want sessions. There is no need for an appointment, waiting, traveling or parking.
- The basic cost is very low and easily budgeted. e-Psychotherapy is not labor intensive.
- The user is monitored regularly for signs and symptoms that may be overlooked in the more conventional therapies. If the need arises, the user is given the appropriate advice and referral.
- The user's private details are protected with the most up to date security.
- Availability. e-Psychotherapy is easily available to all Internet users.

5.2 The implications of e-Psychotherapy

The implications of e-Psychotherapy are profound and can lead to significant changes in:

- The type of services demanded.
- The type of services delivered.

6 Summary

This paper looks at the therapies currently available for emotional distress. It discusses the place of web technology in the next stage in the evolution of therapy. The paper proposes a blueprint for the next generation, e-Psychotherapy. The paper examines the advantages of e-Psychotherapy.