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Innovations in Counseling

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Abstract

The definition of counseling has evolved into a broader scope since the year 2000. It now encompasses a systematic helping process based on the principle of psychology used by the professional counselor to help clients in handling their development, challenges in modern living and mental disorders. Counseling includes crisis intervention, marriage and family counseling, relationship counseling, career counseling, rehabilitation counseling, mental health counseling, sexual trauma counseling, AIDS counseling, philosophical counseling, grief and bereavement counseling, substance abuse counseling, transgender counseling and others. All counseling models and approaches have something to offer when used by a trained counselor. Some theoretical approaches work better than others depending on individual needs. Some counselors integrate several counseling approaches into their personal approach to counseling. In today's world, the field of counseling has expanded to use more innovative approaches such as bio-chemical; spiritual counseling; animal assisted therapies; expressive therapies- art, play, dance/movement, and music therapies; culturally based healing arts; hypnosis; neuro-linguistic programming; neurofeedback; and technology-based applications in counseling.

INTRODUCTION

The role of counseling has evolved into a broader scope since the year 2000. It now encompasses a systematic helping process based on the principle of psychology used by the professional counselor to help clients in handling their development, challenges in modern living and mental disorders. Counseling has an interdisciplinary base and interlinked with psychometrics, psychology, and sociology (See, 2009b).

TYPES OF COUNSELING

In a search for the types of counseling available, the following types of counseling were found. Below are some of the types of counseling listed:

1) Crisis Intervention Counseling

Crisis intervention refers to the methods used to offer immediate, short-term help to individuals who experience an event such as natural disaster; sexual assault or other criminal victimization; medical illness; mental illness; suicide or homicide; and loss or drastic changes in relationships, which produces emotional, mental, physical and behavioral distress or problems (Encyclopedia of Mental Disorders, 2009). In some cases, the counselor will help the individual get through the crisis and refer him/her to further medical care or professional health care, if needed.

Crisis intervention counseling provides education, guidance and support. It also involves outreach work with the community. The process in crisis intervention include education, observation and awareness, discovering and using one's potential, understanding one's problem, creating necessary structure, challenging irrational beliefs and unrealistic expectations, breaking vicious cycles and addictive behavior, creating temporary dependencies, and facing fear as well as emotional pain.

2) Marriage and Family Counseling

Marriage counseling brings the two parties in a marriage together to discuss what problems each has with the other, solve their differences and work towards a better

understanding. The counselor provides an environment and act as mediator for each of them to feel validated and safe.

Family counseling helps family members resolve issues among each other. It also helps them adopt ways to help another family member who is unwell or dying. Family members learn how actions and ways of communicating can help or worsen problems.

3) Relationship Counseling

Relationship counseling helps two or more persons in a family, couples, employees or employers in a workplace, or between a professional and a client on the relationship in an effort to recognize and to better manage or reconcile troublesome differences and repeating patterns of distress.

The counselors help (a) provide a confidential dialogue, which normalizes feelings; (b) enable each person to be heard and to hear themselves; (c) provide a mirror to reflect the relationship's difficulties and the potential and direction for change; (d) empower the individual to take control of its own destiny and make vital decisions about the relationship; and (e) deliver relevant and appropriate information.

4) Guidance and Career Counseling

Guidance and career counseling deal with people who are seeking, vocational, academic and career advice. The counselors help evaluate students' abilities, aptitude, interests and personalities to develop realistic academic, vocational and career goals. They also operate career information centers, career day events and career education programs. These counselors also work with younger students who have academic and

social developmental problems or other special needs. The counselors assist them in finding special education programs, agencies or organizations who can help prepare them for a future career despite their disabilities.

5) Rehabilitation Counseling

Rehabilitation counseling helps individuals with physical, mental (developmental delay and brain injuries), and psychiatric disorders achieve productive and independent lives. It is a relationship where counselors help mentally, emotionally, and physically disabled persons appraise their strengths and weaknesses in relation to their own particular needs so that they may function occupationally and socially in a more adequate manner.

6) Mental Health Counseling

Mental health counseling uses the principles of psychotherapy, human development, learning theory, group dynamics, and the etiology of mental illness and dysfunctional behavior to individuals, couples, families and groups, for the purpose of treating psychopathology and promoting optimal mental health and wellness (MaMHCA, 2009).

The practice encompasses diagnosis and treatment of mental and emotional disorders; psycho-educational techniques aimed at prevention of such disorders; consultations with individuals, couples, families, groups, organizations and communities; and clinical research into more effective psychotherapeutic treatment modalities.

7) Sexual Trauma Counseling

Sexual trauma counseling provides services to child and adult victims of sexual violence and their families through community education and an advocacy model. The counselor helps the victim come to understand the emotional impact of the trauma so that she/he is no longer preoccupied or driven by negative feelings, and must grapple with the meaning of the trauma until an adaptive resolution is achieved. Adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse must begin the healing process as soon as possible because they may sometimes repress the memories of abuse that may come out later in life.

8) AIDS Counseling

AIDS counseling is a specialized branch of counseling that deals with the prevention of the disease and the treatment of clients who have been diagnosed with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) or Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

Counselors who work in this particular field help clients who are directly affected by HIV and AIDS meet their personal, medical, financial and emotional needs. They also educate both patients and the public about the disease; teach the general public about the causes and risk factors of AIDS, and the steps necessary to prevent HIV infection; counsel clients who have already been infected with HIV by teaching them how to prevent the spread of the disease via safe sexual practices, responsible prenatal care, and treatment for drug addiction.

AIDS counseling may cover substance abuse, mental health problems, preparation for death, medication and treatment approaches, financial needs, prenatal care, child care,

family dynamics, and homelessness. There is a need to work with other professionals such as physicians, pharmacists, social workers, and psychologists to help the client.

9) Philosophical Counseling

Philosophical counseling is the application of philosophical knowledge, conceptual analysis, and logical skills to particular dilemmas, predicaments, and concerns that individuals face in everyday life. These concerns can range from a search for meaning in times of crisis to problem solving and decision making, from career-related difficulties to family problems and interpersonal relationships, and from marital problems to end-of-life decisions.

The counselor assists the client to understand the conceptual foundations of his/her behaviors and feelings, thus helping him/her to discover new meaning and ways of expressing him/herself.

10) Grief and Bereavement Counseling

Grief and bereavement counseling refers to a specific form of therapy with the goal of helping the individual grieve and address personal loss in a healthy manner.

Grief and bereavement counseling include emotional expression about the loss (which can include a wide range of feelings), accepting the loss, adjusting to life after the loss, and coping with the changes within oneself and the world after the loss. The counselors also guide the individuals, especially children and adults with terminal diseases to prepare them to encounter death.

11) Substance Abuse Counseling

Substance abuse counseling is regarded as one of the most challenging fields of human/social services. It helps people who have addictions with drugs and alcohol. The counselors provide counseling to addicts and former addicts. Sometimes it also includes crisis intervention. They also help the family members and friends of addicts whose lives are affected by the addiction.

The role of counselor is to help the client deals with issues; help with the practical aspects of the client's life such as finding employment; and refer client to organizations that can offer help such as family agencies, vocational training centers, and welfare agencies.

12) Transgender Counseling

The ultimate goal of transgender counseling is to help the transgendered individuals accept their uniqueness, rather than hiding it away in shame or confusion. It is easy for transgendered people to become isolated, often due to denial and withdrawal. Counselors can help them fully integrate in all areas of society, including the home, workplace and places of worship.

The counselors offer a safe, secure, confidential place to allow the individuals to discuss their feelings, thoughts and fears without reprisal, embarrassment or having their words made public; help them work toward self-awareness and self-acceptance, without being manipulative or abusive; offer couples and family counseling; and make referrals to, or help in locating medical, legal and financial assistance.

COUNSELING MODELS

All counseling models and approaches have something to offer when used by a trained counselor. Some theoretical approaches work better than others depending on individual and/or cultural needs. Some counselors integrate several counseling approaches into their personal approach to counseling and/or appropriate to the cultural needs. According to Gladding in the book titled “Counseling Theories” (2005), some of the more common counseling models are:

- (1) Psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic theories (Sigmund Freud)
- (2) Person-centered therapy (Carl Rogers)
- (3) Cognitive and cognitive-behavioral therapy (Aaron Beck and Donald Meichenbaum)
- (4) Behavioral therapy (B.F. Skinner)
- (5) Rational emotive behavior therapy (Albert Ellis)
- (6) Bowen family systems therapy (Murray Bowen)
- (7) Strategic family therapy (Jay Haley)
- (8) Adlerian therapy (Alfred Adler)
- (9) Solution-focused therapy (Steve Deshazer and Bill O’Hanlon)
- (10) Existential therapy (Rollo May and Victor Frankl)
- (11) Gestalt therapy (Fritz Perls)
- (12) Reality therapy (William Glasser)
- (13) Transactional analysis (Eric Berne)
- (14) Feminist therapy (Carol Gilligan)
- (15) Eclectic

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO COUNSELING

Innovative approaches to counseling emphasize the interrelationship between mind, body, and spirit in recovery and healing. Although some people with mental health problems recover using alternative methods alone, most people combine them with medication. It is crucial, however, to consult with individual's health care providers about the approaches he/she is using to achieve mental wellness. Although some alternative approaches have a long history, many remain controversial. The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at the National Institutes of Health was set-up to help evaluate alternative methods of treatment and to integrate those that are effective into mainstream health care practice (SAMHSA, 2009).

The author has identified various innovative approaches to counseling that are used in the recent years.

1) Bio-chemical

Food intake can affect mood, behavior and brain function. Changes in energy or nutrient intake can alter both brain chemistry and the functioning of nerves in the brain, thus, influencing mood, sleep patterns and thinking. Deficiencies or excesses of certain vitamins or minerals can damage nerves in the brain, causing changes in memory, limiting problem-solving ability, and impairing brain function.

Adjusting both diet and nutrition may help some people with mental illnesses manage their symptoms and promote recovery. For example, research suggests that eliminating milk and wheat products can reduce the severity of symptoms for some people who have schizophrenia and some children with autism. Similarly, some

holistic/natural physicians use herbal treatments, B-complex vitamins, riboflavin, magnesium and thiamine to treat anxiety, autism, depression, drug-induced psychoses and hyperactivity.

According to Medical Nutrition Handbook Introduction (2009), changes in eating habits require complex changes in behavior, and thus counseling for behavior change is needed. For effective intervention, the US Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends brief interventions using the "5 A's" format.

- (a) **Assess:** Ask about/assess behavioral health risk(s) and factors in order to choose appropriate behavior change goals/methods.
- (b) **Advice:** Give clear, specific and personalized behavior change advice, including information about personal health harms/benefits.
- (c) **Agree:** Collaboratively select appropriate treatment goals and methods based on the client's interest in and willingness to change the behavior.
- (d) **Assist:** Using behavior change techniques (self-help and/or counseling) to help the client in achieving agreed-upon goals by acquiring the skills, confidence, and social/environmental supports for behavior change, supplemented with adjunctive medical treatments when appropriate (e.g., pharmacotherapy for tobacco dependence, contraceptive drugs/devices).
- (e) **Arrange:** Schedule follow-up contacts (in person or by telephone) to provide ongoing assistance/support and to adjust the treatment plan as needed, including referral to more intensive or specialized treatment.

2) Spiritual Counseling

Spiritual counseling provides support for the client's belief and value system, support the essence of the client, and facilitate spiritual growth. Spiritual counseling employs the power of prayer and affirmation, spiritual healing and touch, and soulful conversation. The major focus is upon aspects such as faith, devotion, wisdom, compassion, spiritual techniques (e.g. prayer and meditation), and spiritual experiences. The goal of spiritual counseling is to help individual find his/her spiritual self.

Some people prefer to seek help for mental health problems from their pastor, religious teachers, or priest, rather than from counselors who are not affiliated with a religious community. Counselors working within traditional faith communities increasingly are recognizing the need to incorporate psychotherapy and/or medication, along with prayer and spirituality, to effectively help people with mental disorders. Spiritual counseling can take the form of spiritual retreats which offer one-on-one session or group session. Some spiritual retreats are held in silence, but others may have a lot of conversation and interaction.

3) Animal Assisted Therapies

Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) is the utilization of animals as a therapeutic modality to facilitate healing and rehabilitation of patients with acute or chronic diseases. It is a type of therapy that involves an animal with specific characteristics becoming a fundamental part of a person's treatment. Animal-assisted therapy is designed to improve the physical, social, emotional, and/or cognitive functioning of the client, as well as provide educational and motivational impact on clients. During AAT, therapists

document records and evaluate the client's progress. The kinds of animals used in therapy include dogs, cats, elephants, birds, dolphins, rabbits, lizards, and other small animals. Such animals are often referred to as comfort animals.

Working with an animal (or animals) under the guidance of a therapist may benefit clients by facilitating positive changes, such as increased empathy, enhanced socialization skills, develop self-esteem, and reduce loneliness and anxiety. Animals can be used as part of group therapy programs to encourage communication and increase the ability to focus.

4) Expressive Therapies

Expressive therapy, also known as expressive arts therapy or creative arts therapy uses the process of creation as a form of therapy. Expressive therapy is based on the assumption that people can heal through use of imagination and creative expression. Some common types of expressive therapy include (a) art therapy, (b) play therapy, (c) dance/movement therapy, and (d) music/sound therapy. The therapists share the belief that through creative expression and the tapping of the imagination, a person becomes aware and thus examine the body, feelings, emotions and his/her thought process.

(a) Art Therapy

Art therapy uses drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, and other forms of visual art expression. The therapists recognize the nonverbal symbols and metaphors that are communicated within the creative process, which might be difficult to express in words or in other modalities. The therapists help their clients to discover the underlying

thoughts and feelings through the artwork and its meaning, to them, so that they may gain insight and judgment, thus developing a better understanding of themselves and the way they relate to the people around them.

(b) *Play Therapy*

Play therapy uses the therapeutic power of play to help clients prevent or resolve psychosocial challenges and achieve optimal growth and development. Play therapy is used as a tool of diagnosis. For example, the therapist observes a client playing with toys (play-houses, pets, dolls, etc.) to determine the cause of the problem behavior. The objects and patterns of play, as well as the willingness to interact with the therapist, can be used to understand the underlying cause of the client's behavior both inside and outside the session.

According to the psychodynamic view, people (especially children) engage in play behavior to work through their fears and anxieties. In this way, play therapy can be used as a self-help mechanism. From a developmental point of view, play is an essential component of cognitive, social and emotional development. Thus, play therapy is used with children, especially those with language impairment, mental disabilities and slow-learners. Adults usually need a "safe" environment before indulging in the relaxed spontaneity of play therapy, so a skilled therapist is needed to engage such guarded individuals.

(c) *Dance/Movement Therapy*

Dance/movement therapy is defined as the use of movement in the process of integrating the emotion, cognition and physical aspects of an individual.

Dance/movement therapy effects changes in feelings, cognition, physical functioning, and behavior. Today, people of all ages and varying conditions receive dance/movement therapy. These individuals include people with eating disorders, adult survivors of violence, sexually and physically abused children, dysfunctional families, the homeless, autistic children, the elderly, and substance abusers. An evolving area of specialization is using dance/movement therapy in disease prevention and health promotion programs. More innovative programs in dance/movement therapy have expanded to people with cardiovascular disease, hypertension, chronic pain, or breast cancer. (The American Dance Therapy Association Inc., 2009).

In the recent years, children with disabilities, including cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome, mental retardation, emotional problems, physical disability, and mental disability have benefited and grown greatly because of experience gained from dance/movement therapy. The clients explore, experience, express and enjoy the session resulting in later holistic development taking place naturally and spontaneously, as well as transferring the skills to real life.

(d) *Music/Sound Therapy*

Music therapy is a holistic form of therapy which involves the skillful use of music as a therapeutic tool to restore, maintain and/or improve a person's physical, emotional, social, cognitive and psychological well-being regardless of age, musical

background or challenges. Because music is a universal language, its unique qualities make it an effective and distinctive mode of therapy with both children and adults of varying needs, abilities and languages, providing a positive outlet of self-expression and release of built-up energy (See, 2009a).

The World Federation of Music Therapy (1996) defined music therapy as the use of music and/or its musical elements (sound, rhythm, melody and harmony) by a qualified therapist with a client or group, in a process designed to facilitate and promote communication, relationships, learning, mobilization, expression, organization and other relevant therapeutic objectives in order to meet physical, emotional, psycho-social, and cognitive needs. Music therapy aims to develop potentials and/or restore functions of the individual so that he or she can achieve better intra and/or interpersonal integration and, consequently, a better quality of life through prevention, rehabilitation or treatment.

5) Culturally Based Healing Arts

Traditional oriental healing treatment (such as acupuncture, shiatsu, and reiki), Indian systems of health care (such as Ayurveda and yoga), Chinese systems of health care (such as Martial Arts, *Tai Chi*, *Chi Gong*, *Yuan Chi* and *Wai Dan Gong*), and religious chants all incorporate the beliefs that wellness is a state of balance between the spiritual, physical, and mental/emotional "selves". An imbalance of forces within the body is the cause of illness, and herbal/natural remedies, combined with sound nutrition, exercise, and meditation/prayer will correct this imbalance.

Counselors and psychologists must be aware and understand these culturally based healing arts practiced within the community, so that they can be culturally sensitive to the practice and needs of the client, and help the client effectively.

6) Hypnosis

Hypnosis is a mental state (state theory) or set of attitudes (non-state theory) usually induced by a procedure known as a hypnotic induction, which comprises a series of preliminary instructions and suggestions. Hypnotic suggestions may be delivered by a hypnotist in the presence of the client, or may be self-administered ("self-suggestion" or "autosuggestion"). The use of hypnotism for therapeutic purposes is referred to as "hypnotherapy". Although there is a misconception that hypnosis is a form of unconsciousness resembling sleep, contemporary research suggests that it is actually a wakeful state of focused attention and heightened suggestibility, with diminished peripheral awareness.

7) Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP)

Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) helps the client to access behavior and thought processes. McDonnell (1993) explains the word "Neuro" as knowing and representing the world through neurological processes", referring to the five senses; "Linguistic" as the use of language to order thought and behavior; and "Programming" as organizing ideas and thought into actions, often in a largely automatic way.

NLP places great emphasis on concepts that work as opposed to concepts that should work. The therapists use tools such as meta model, sensory acuity, Milton model, system representation and submodalities.

NLP is a process of discovery and as such it is about continually uncovering new ways of thinking and working. The therapist makes the unconscious conscious and help the client to be consciously aware of what he/she does unconsciously.

8) Neurofeedback

Neurofeedback, also called electroencephalogram (EEG) biofeedback or neurotherapy, is an adjunctive treatment used for conditions such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, phobic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, bipolar disorder, depression and affective disorders, autism, and addictive disorders (Moore, 2000; Rosenfeld, 2000; Trudeau, 2000).

Neurofeedback is a technique used to train the brain to help improve its ability to regulate all bodily functions and to take care of itself. When the brain is not functioning well, evidence of this often shows up in the EEG (Electroencephalogram). By challenging the brain, we can help the brain learn to function better (EEG Spectrum International, Inc., 2009a).

The neurofeedback training is a non-invasive procedure. One or more sensors are placed on the scalp, and one to each ear. The brain waves are monitored by means of an amplifier and a computer-based instrument that processes the signal and provides the proper feedback. This is displayed to the client by means of a video game or other video

display, along with audio signals. The client is asked to play the video game with his brain. If the activity in a desirable frequency band increases, the video game moves faster or some other reward is given. If the activity in an adverse band increases, the video game is inhibited. Gradually, the brain responds to the cues that are given, and a "learning" of new brain wave patterns takes place (EEG Spectrum International, Inc., 2009b).

9) Technology-based Applications in Counseling

The boom in electronic tools at home and in the office makes access to mental health information just a telephone call or a "mouse click" away. Technology is also making treatment more widely available. Examples of technology-based applications in counseling are telephone counseling and e-counseling.

(a) Telephone Counseling

For many people telephone counseling is often the first step to receiving further mental health care. Research shows that such counseling from specially trained counselors reach many people who otherwise might not get the information, help or referral they need.

(b) E-Counseling

E-counseling uses the Internet via email and live chat. While the individual is not able to see or speak vocally to the counselor, they are still able to communicate their thoughts in order to gain advice and help.

Finally, the author wishes to add that Malaysia has been the first South East Asian country to require all counselors to be regulated and licensed by a statutory body called the *Lembaga Kaunselor* (Counsellors Act 580, 1998). The expressed objective is to ensure quality and ethical practice. The *Lembaga Kaunselor* also carries out training and awareness programs to improve counselors' skills and practice. This allows counselors to be organized and to participate in international forums as a body.

CONCLUSION

With the rapid growth of the industrial world, individuals are experiencing different types of mental health problems. Appropriate care and intervention must be in place for those experiencing these problems towards attaining sustainable health. Counselors need to play an important role in the society by promoting mental health and wellness; educating the public in various types of mental health problems; preventing mental health problems; and improving accessibility to counseling services. This can be much improved with the official government recognition of counselor as a profession.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recently estimated that 450 million people worldwide live with significant untreated mental health problems (Saraceno, 2006). WHO (2003) had earlier estimated that one in four people then experienced psychological distress that met the criteria for a diagnosable mental disorder at some point in their lives. The World Health Organization has also estimated that about 154 million people suffer from depression. Every year, one million people commit suicide, 60% of which are the outcome of depression and schizophrenia. Depression is already the

fourth cause of the global disease burden, and by 2020 it is expected to rank second, following ischemic heart disease.

In order to increase the availability and accessibility of mental health services, we need to have more counselors and psychologists in the mental health care. This paper provides an overview of the types and models of counseling available, and many innovative approaches to counseling, so that the counselors and psychologists in clinical practice are aware of the skills we need to acquire in our pursuit to help our clients. Thus, it is important for us to maintain, improve and broaden our knowledge, skills and develop the personal qualities required in our professional lives through active participation in the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programs.

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