When Helping Doesn’t Help—Overcoming Therapeutic Resistance

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David’s Paper

  Psychotherapy Networker, 41(2), 18 – 27, 60.
  https://www.psychotherapynetworker.org/blog/details/1160/when-helping-doesnt-help

Two Questions

- How effective are the current “schools” of therapy in the treatment of depression and anxiety disorders?
- How effective are we as individual clinicians?
Disappointing Results with Most Outcome Studies

- At best, only 50% of depressed and anxious patients, at most, improve when treated with:
  - Psychotherapy—all types
  - Antidepressants
  - Placebos

Clinical Experiences Confirm Research Findings

- Some patients seem to resist the clinician’s sincere efforts to help
  - The woman who didn’t want to do psychotherapy homework

Process Research—How Does Psychotherapy Actually Work?

- What are the key ingredients of therapeutic success or failure?
- What’s different about the patients who do not respond to treatment?
- Can we use this information to improve outcomes?
Results of Process Research

- Empathy influenced recovery from depression
  - But the causal effect was only modest

- Psychotherapy HW compliance also influenced recovery from depression
  - And the causal effect was large

- Patient “Willingness” also had large direct and indirect effects on recovery

Results (cont’d)

- Willingness effect replicated in five different samples
  - Inpatients and outpatients

- First variable in the world literature with large, robust and consistent causal effects on recovery from depression
  - Published online 22 April 2012
Could We Boost Therapeutic Effectiveness by

- Developing new techniques to address resistance and enhance patient motivation?
  - But what is “resistance”?
  - And can it be modified?

Most Traditional Views of Resistance are Negative

- Secondary gains
  - Neediness / fears of being alone
- Fears of change
- Addiction to self-pity and role as victim
- Negative sense of identity

New Model for Therapeutic Resistance

- Outcome Resistance
  - Ambivalence about change
- Process Resistance
  - Ambivalence about doing the work
Outcome and Process Resistance Differ for Each Target

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Outcome Resistance</th>
<th>Process Resistance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Non-acceptance</td>
<td>Homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Magical thinking</td>
<td>Exposure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Not wanting to get</td>
<td>Blame</td>
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<tr>
<td>problems</td>
<td>close</td>
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<tr>
<td>Habits &amp;</td>
<td>Entitlement &amp;</td>
<td>Discipline &amp;</td>
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<td>addictions</td>
<td>pleasure</td>
<td>deprivation</td>
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New Model (cont’d)

- The patient’s resistance often
  - Reveals something positive and awesome about the patient’s core values.
  - Is beneficial and provides tangible benefits.

What’s TEAM-CBT?

T = Testing
E = Empathy
A = (Paradoxical) Agenda Setting
M = Methods
Clinical Examples
- Janice: “I murdered my baby.”
- Rameesh: “They’re conspiring against me!”
- Sam: “They locked me in a walk-in freezer.”
- Bennie: “I’m a hopeless case, and there’s nothin’ you can do about it”

Does TEAM-CBT Really Deliver Superior Results?
- Clinical experiences extremely encouraging
- Preliminary research also encouraging
- Outcome study at the Feeling Good Institute in Mt. View, CA is about to be launched
  - Must be very cautious until we see those results!

Resources for Clinicians and Patients
- www.feelinggood.com
  - Dr. Burns’ Feeling Good Podcasts and Feeling Good Blogs
    - for you and your clients
    - Workshop announcements
Resources (cont’d)

- Drs. Burns offers unlimited free psychotherapy training for local mental health professionals at Stanford
  - Tuesdays, 5 to 7:30 pm
  - Improve your psychotherapy skills
  - Difficult case consultation
  - Personal work

Resources (cont’d)

- Tools, Not Schools, of Therapy
  - Dr. Burns’ interactive psychotherapy e-textbook
  - Email david@feelinggood.com for more information

- Therapist’s Toolkit
  - State of the art assessment and treatment tools
  - Email david@feelinggood.com for more information
  - Or check it out in the conference bookstore

Resources (cont’d)

- Feeling Good Institute, Mt. View, CA
- www.feelinggoodinstitute.com
  - T.E.A.M. Certification program
  - Mentoring / Clinical supervision
  - Training, including weekend workshops
  - Weekly online courses, including CE’s
  - Treatment, including intensives
Resources (cont’d)

- Dr. Burns’ books for the general public
  - Feeling Good
  - Feeling Good Together
  - The Feeling Good Handbook
  - Ten Days to Self-Esteem
  - When Panic Attacks
  - Intimate Connections
- There’s a new book in the works!