

PREFACE

Our interest in health anxiety has been developing over the past 20 years. It grew out of our work with adults with a variety of anxiety disorders. We often found that our clients would describe intense anxiety about illness and death. When we asked about significant life events related to the development of anxiety, many people noted that their problems intensified when there was serious illness or death among those who were close to them. As our interest in fears of illness and death developed, we started to ask clients more directly about these concerns, and we were struck even more by how common these fears of illness and death were for people with various anxiety disorders.

When we looked for research to guide us in helping our clients with these concerns, we were struck by how little had been done on the treatment of health anxiety. The work of the pioneers in this area (Arthur Barsky in Boston; and Isaac Marks, Hilary Warwick, and Paul Salkovskis in the UK) was helpful, but there was, initially, little specific information to guide the clinician. We could find no research on the treatment of death anxiety in clinical populations.

While clients were enthusiastic about obtaining help in dealing with health and death anxiety, other clinicians often expressed discouragement about the challenges of dealing with these problems and made comments such as “What an impossible area to work in!” and “How can you see clients who complain all the time?” We are pleased to say that we have found this to be enormously interesting and rewarding work.

In developing interventions, we used our experience with treatment of the anxiety disorders. We also looked to the early studies of treatment of hypochondriasis that were beginning to appear in the literature. When it became known that we had a special interest in treatment of health anxiety, we received many interesting referrals. As a result, we have now seen

many clients for individual and group therapy addressing a wide variety of concerns related to fear of illness and death. This has allowed us to fine-tune our intervention strategies and develop materials that are helpful in implementing treatment. This book represents our efforts to put these ideas in one place in a format that we hope clinicians will find useful.

In writing this book we focused on the interests of clinicians. Part 1 consists of three chapters that focus on understanding health anxiety in its various forms. Part 2 describes practical approaches to assessment and treatment. The principal components of intervention are described in separate chapters with client handouts that may be used by the clinician in implementing treatment. Chapter 6 describes how the treatment components can be applied in an integrated fashion based on the case formulation. Part 3 describes adaptations of treatment useful when dealing with children and adolescents, the medically ill and the elderly. The book ends with a list of resources that we find useful in our clinical work.

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A Practitioner's Guide

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