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Computers and the Internet

The use of the Internet implies an interactive involvement in the process of acquiring information. To retain such information and incorporate it in one's daily life, that information needs to be in writing, either in printed form for reception or in one's handwriting or typing for recording reactions and responses (Pulier, Mount, McMenamin, & Maheu, 2007). If the Internet is indeed the most revolutionary development in the last generation, the information it yields will need to be transferred to participant records and documentation. This approach has made it relatively easy to help people through distance writing (DW) without ever seeing them face-to-face or even talking with them.

Consequently, reliance on DW, as the next inevitable step in the evolution of mental health interventions from face-to-face talk-based, suggests possibly a completely different paradigm. Ultimately, in its extreme, this DW-based paradigm implies never seeing participants face-to-face or talking with them, as happens every day online. DW includes a variety of approaches discussed in great detail in Chap. 6.

The ever-increasing role of the Internet in providing information to help people in need of greater knowledge about their perceived troublesome conditions is a topic considered briefly by Norcross (2006). This topic is discussed in greater detail in Chap. 3. There are at least four self-help advances not considered by Norcross. These advances have significant implications for the evolutionary progress of mental health interventions

because they are evidence-based rather than based on the subjective impressions or personal opinions of mental health professionals, let alone participants: (1) the advent of DW as an additional or alternative approach to traditional face-to-face talk-based interventions (see Chap. 6), (2) greater use of homework assignments to increase and widen the scope and effect of face-to-face talk-based interventions (see Chap. 4), (3) the meteoric growth of written self-help mental health practice exercises and source-books (see Chap. 7), and (4) the rise of low-cost approaches to promote physical and mental health (see Chap. 5).

All these approaches involve the use of writing, a skill that does cover the majority of the population including psychiatric participants who seem able to type on computers what they seem unable to express verbally (Bloom, 1992). For those who protest this limitation, that is, the exclusion of illiterate people from this approach, one needs to be reminded that most illiterates are also excluded from talk-based approaches. Furthermore, this population can be helped by taped recordings or by volunteers who translate the written instructions and transcribe the participant's responses.

CONCLUSION

The Internet will become one of the major avenues of service delivery in the mental health field. Thus, I developed a graduate curriculum for middle-level professionals to become experts in delivering structured self-help mental health practice exercises for individuals, couples, and families (L'Abate, 2008d).

<http://www.springer.com/978-1-4419-1353-1>

Sourcebook of Interactive Practice Exercises in Mental
Health

L'Abate, L.

2011, XVIII, 1176 p. 2 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-4419-1353-1