



CUSTOM MEDIA FEATURE

February is Psychology Month

Psychologists in Primary Care

WWW.APNS.CA

Reforming Primary Health Care (PHC) For Healthier Communities

There is no health without mental health

Mental health is an integral element of PHC and patients regularly turn to primary care providers for support, treatment and access to specialized mental health resources. Between 35-70% of people who visit their family physicians have a mental health problem or disorder and 50% of people who commit suicide visited their family physician in the month prior to their suicide. Family physicians are essential but they are not mental health experts and may not be well positioned to manage these problems.

Better physical health

Cancer, cardiovascular diseases such as stroke and heart attack, diabetes, and lung disease are the

4 biggest causes of illness and death in Canada. You can significantly reduce your risk of getting these diseases by adopting only 8 health habits: exercise regularly, eat a healthy diet, maintain a healthy weight, avoid or stop smoking, reduce stress, limit alcohol intake, control blood pressure and be regularly screened for health problems. Family physicians recommend these habits but they are not experts in changing bad habits or establishing new, healthy ones.

The solution:

Restructure primary care to integrate physical and mental health care. Interdisciplinary, community-based, primary care is the most cost effective and efficacious means of delivering health care services.

What Can Psychologists Contribute As Part Of A Reformed PHC System?

Ensuring that Psychologists are part of every primary care team can help to achieve healthier communities. Psychologists are the largest, specialized, regulated mental and behavioural health profession in Canada and are unique among service providers in mental health in that they work across multiple settings such as schools, hospitals, correctional facilities, community offices and clinics, industry. Psychologists have the training and skills required to work in a coordinated manner within a multidisciplinary team. They offer assessment, consultation, treatment, and program evaluation services. They are trained to diagnose and treat mental illnesses and addictions. Psychologists have de-

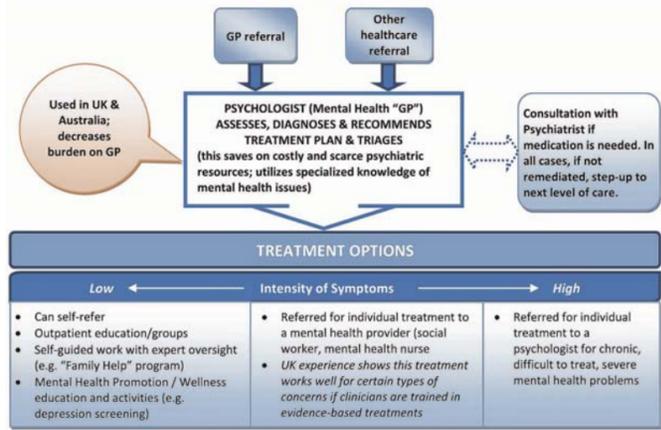
veloped many interventions that have been demonstrated to be effective:

- smoking cessation programmes
- behaviour management strategies for chronic and occasional insomnia
- therapies for the most common mental health problems: depression, all of the anxiety disorders (OCD, panic disorder, PTSD, generalized anxiety disorder etc.)
- help for other diseases and disorders that are routinely seen in primary care.

Overall, the research shows that psychological interventions produce comparable or superior outcomes to medication, prevent relapse, have lower drop-out rates and are preferred by Canadians.

A NEW MODEL OF CARE: COLLABORATIVE PRIMARY CARE

HOW IT COULD WORK



What Are The Mental Health Needs?

The Mental Health Commission of Canada reports that the economic cost of mental health problems and illnesses is over \$50 billion each year. The annual per capita health and disability costs of depression are greater than those associated with hypertension, and comparable to those associated with heart disease, diabetes and back problems.

Many physical health problems can lead to mental health problems. Patients with certain types

of cancer and cancer treatments are more likely to become anxious or depressed. About one 1 of every 6 patients with heart disease will develop major depressive symptoms. But mental health problems also contribute to physical health problems. Depression in particular increases the risk of heart disease and mortality. Depression is known to damage the immune system that protects health.

Stress alone is one of the biggest single risk factors for poor health and death, damaging the immune system and increasing susceptibility to disease, reducing the capacity to recover from injury, and increasing mortality. The Mayo Clinic notes that stress is a factor in: Heart disease, Sleep problems, Digestive problems, Depression, Obesity, Memory impairment and Skin Conditions, such as eczema.

Psychological Interventions Are Cost Effective

Dozens of research studies have found that effective psychological interventions result in reduced or even avoided costs to the health care system. These "cost offsets" have been found for many conditions, such as heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, cancer and chronic pain. There is agreement in research by health economists that psychology services yield cost-savings. One estimate is that every \$1 spent on psychology services yields \$5 saved in medical costs.

Psychological interventions are estimated to cost between 10-50% less than pharmacological ones.

One study found that brief, group psychological intervention for women who had completed medical treatment for Stage 0, 1, or 2 breast cancer, resulted in an improvement in patients' adjustment and quality of life and a reduction of 23% in health care costs for the two following years.

A recent Canadian study appearing in the Canadian Family Physician found that assigning primary care patients to psychological treatment resulted in a 49% reduction of visits to family physicians, and significant decreases in total health spending. The Health Enhancement Re-

search Organization (HERO) in Birmingham, Alabama has shown that primary care patients who receive stress management interventions required fewer hospitalizations and emergency room visits. HERO found that medical costs were 70% higher among individuals with untreated depression and 46% higher among individuals reporting uncontrolled and untreated stress. In fact, depression and stress were the primary predictors of total health care costs. The study included over 46,000 workers at several major U.S. companies.

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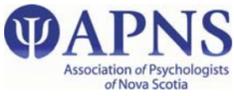
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Psychologists in Primary Care

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Managing symptoms with emotion-focused psychotherapy

By Dr. S. Gerald Hann, R. Psych.

Have you experienced symptoms such as chest pain, abdominal pain or headache? What about other physical symptoms without pain, such as fatigue, dizziness, or heart palpitations?

If you are like many people, you may have consulted your primary care physician for such symptoms. Often these symptoms come on unexpectedly and without warning, making most people fear that there must be an undetected physical problem. If your physical complaints have been fully investigated and no medical explanation has been found, your doctor may tell you that you are experiencing stress-related symptoms, or "somatization".

Physicians and psychologists define somatization as a person's tendency to experience psychological stress as physical or bodily symptoms. This does not mean the symptoms are imaginary, in fact the result of constantly having to deal with life's challenges means you may

be experiencing emotional symptoms in your body.

Medical researchers who have studied somatization in outpatient medical visits estimate that it may be involved in upwards of 50% of all such visits. Of this, at least one third to one half have no medical explanation for their symptoms.

Medications can give some symptom relief, but do not eliminate the problem. Many people end up taking medication for a very long time just to "control" the physical symptoms of anxiety and/or depression. Not surprisingly, people who are prone to anxiety or depression are also more likely to experience somatization.

Fortunately, Montreal psychiatrist Dr. Habib Davanloo has developed short-term psychodynamic psychotherapy (STPP) which focuses on emotion. This therapy helps patients experience many of their unconscious emotions, and therefore rapidly eliminate their symptoms. In general, STPP has been found to be highly effective in treating somatization, anxiety and depression. In 2009 medical researchers (Abbass, Kisley & Kroenke) examined 23

studies and reported significant and long-lasting improvement for reducing somatic symptoms using STPP. Furthermore, they found that STPP resulted in sustained benefits for patients and this also translated to reduced healthcare down the road.

To determine if stress could be contributing to your physical symptoms, an interview is conducted with a focus on how stress affects your health. During the interview you might become more conscious of your emotions and your body's response to these emotions. For most people, one interview often brings a reduction in physical symptoms. Symptoms such as chest pain or dizziness can be reduced or eliminated from one session. Compared to traditional talk therapies, this adds up to rapid reduction or elimination of your symptoms. Over 80% of patients who have used this approach discontinue medication for anxiety or depression.

The cost savings in therapy and medication speak for themselves.

If you are experiencing such symptoms, and they have been medically investigated but no medical explanation has been found, consider discussing this treatment with your family doctor. Short-term dynamic psychotherapy might be the best approach for reducing or eliminating your symptoms.

S. Gerald Hann is Director of Dr. S. Gerald Hann Psychological Services and offers diagnostic interviewing for stress factors.

"Having good health is very different from only being not sick"

Pliny the Younger
~90 AD

Primary Health Care (PHC)

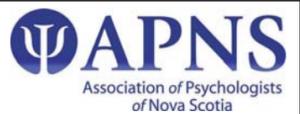
Primary Health Care (PHC) is the first level of contact with the health system and is usually delivered by your family doctor. "Primary healthcare is the cornerstone of prevention and early identification of illness and management of chronic disease" (Chomiene & Grenier). With a broad range of health professionals working together at the primary level, the combined knowledge and skills becomes a powerful system to enhance the health of the population served. To be effective, a PHC system is integrated with other services and sectors, e.g. secondary and tertiary health care, education, workplace, child welfare, and the criminal justice system.



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Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology

What is a psychologist and why do I care?

Psychologists:

- treat children, adults, couples, families
- diagnose psychological and emotional problems
- consult, counsel, provide therapy and assessments
- consult to individuals, groups, organizations
- help people attain better physical and mental health
- help people achieve better personal, social and vocational adjustment
- teach and apply psychological theory and principles
- design, conduct and communicate psychological research.

Only individuals registered with the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology are entitled to use the term, "Psychologist", or to provide "psychological services," by virtue of the Psychologists Act of Nova Scotia.

It is important to know that many terms are not licensed titles. For example, the term "psychotherapist" and singular terms such as "counsellor" and "therapist" are not licensed titles. There is no assurance of the qualifications of anyone using only these titles and no regulatory body to handle complaints about their practices.

Psychologists are required by law to deliver competent, ethical and professional services. They are accountable to the public, through the NSBEP. Psychologists meet rigorous professional requirements and adhere to prescribed standards, guidelines and ethical principles. They must also follow requirements for maintaining competency throughout their career.

You are protected when you see a psychologist because psychologists must adhere to the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists, and Standards for service and conduct, which are established by the NSBEP. The NSBEP investigates and addresses complaints against Psychologists. There is no such public protection for practitioners designated only by such terms as counsellor, therapist or psychotherapist.

The Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology (NSBEP) protects the public. The NSBEP has the statutory authority to register and regulate practitioners of psychology by way of the Psychologists Act. The Act also enables the prosecution of anyone holding him/herself out as a provider of psychological services who is not registered with the NSBEP.

Psychologists meet specific requirements for education, examinations, and supervision.

Psychologists have at least these qualifications:

- a doctoral or masters degree in psychology
- two years of supervised experience, in the case of a doctoral degree, or four years, in the case of a masters degree, and
- have passed a standardized, written examination and an oral examination.

Psychologists (Candidate Register) have the same educational qualifications and are in the process of completing their supervised experience.

Any questions?

For more information please visit the Board's website. The website includes a Directory of Psychologists allowing you to locate a psychologist by name, address, language(s) of service, and area(s) of practice.

If you are unsure about whether the person you are seeing is a psychologist, or have any concerns about the ethical conduct of a psychologist, contact the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology.

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