



# February is Psychology Month

## Accessing Psychological Treatments

WWW.APNS.CA

### Get the services you need

**VICTOR DAY, PH.D.**

More than 50 years of research has shown the effectiveness of psychological treatment for many problems, and psychological assessments are very useful for a great variety of issues.

Nevertheless, many people who would benefit from psychological services do not access them.

There are a variety of reasons for this. One is that many people are unsure of how to do so. In this article I will outline some ways you can do this.

It can seem complicated, because each psychologist specializes in only certain areas of psychology, and some may only work with children or with adults.

Moreover, the common ways of accessing other professional services, such as by going to the same person who serves other members of your family, or by asking neighbours or co-workers for recommendations, may not be something you wish to do. It's not quite the same as looking for a dentist or an accountant.

First, it is helpful to know that about half of practising psychologists in Nova Scotia work just for some public institution or agency, such as a health authority, school system, or university; and about half work full or part-time in private practice.

Public-service and private-practice psychologists are equally qualified and collectively offer similar ranges of services, and sometimes are the same people (e.g. when psychologists working for public institutions also do

part-time private practice).

The big advantage of accessing psychological services through a publically-funded institution or agency is that the services will be provided without direct cost to you. For some people, this is the only way that they can access psychological services.

However, public services usually are not organized in a way that lets you directly make an appointment to see a psychologist. Often you will need to be first screened by someone else, who may or may not arrange for you to see a psychologist, depending upon whether you meet certain criteria; or you may need to be referred by some other professional (e.g. a student's teacher in order to see a school psychologist, or a physician to access some psychologists who specialize in particular health problems).

Nevertheless, you have a right to influence the decisions about your care and services. If you want to see a psychologist because you want that type of service a psychologist can provide, then say so, to the person who is doing the screening or referral.

How can you find out what psychological services are available? If you are wondering what's available within some particular health authority, university or school system, that information is probably available on that institution's website.

If you're wondering what's generally available within your community, you can phone 211, or ask your family physician, since family physicians are knowledgeable



Many people who would benefit from psychological services do not access them, simply because they do not know how to do so. **123RF**

about local resources.

Alternatively, you may wish to see a private practice psychologist. Private practice psychologists operate out of private offices and charge you for their services.

Almost all private health insurance plans, including the ones typically offered to employees of major employers (including the government), cover psychological services, at least up to some limit.

An advantage of seeing a private practice psychologist is that it is usually easier and faster to get an appointment. It can be as simple as phoning the psychologist's office directly yourself, and arranging an appointment within a couple of weeks. But how do you

know which psychologist to go to? There are a variety of ways:

- Search via the APNS website at [www.apns.ca](http://www.apns.ca), which provides a list of private practice psychologists, which is searchable by areas of expertise, location, gender and languages spoken.
- Phone APNS 902-494-2081 to ask for the contact information of psychologists who can help you with your concerns.
- Ask the advice of your physician, physiotherapist or other health professional whom they might recommend.
- If you have a need for some very specialized service or other special requirements, such that it

is not clear from generally available information which psychologist is appropriate, then you may wish to ask a psychologist who is in more general practice whom they would recommend for that particular issue.

Of course, you will also want to meet the psychologist for an initial session, and discuss your concerns and how they might help you, and then decide whether you wish to continue with that person, as you would with any professional relationship.

Dr. Victor Day is president of APNS and in part-time private practice at Marsh-Knickle and Associates.

### Chasing sleep: The quest for getting enough Zs

**DANIEL CHORNEY, PH.D.**

Benjamin Franklin once famously said that there are only two certainties in life — death and taxes. I would argue there is a third certainty in life — disordered sleep.

No one is immune to sleep problems at some point in their lives and, for the most part, this is pretty typical. Whether it's tossing and turning if you have a flu, waking repeatedly to the sound of a child crying through the night, or just staying up a little too late with the friends, we've all been sleep deprived at some point.

A restless night prior to a big interview, test, or special event is not only normal, it's almost expected.

Unfortunately, some people struggle with more severe sleep issues and suffer with chronic, life-long insomnia that can become its own cycle regardless of stress or what's happening around them.

We're only now beginning to understand the true consequences of poor sleep in adults and children.

Everyone is familiar with the feelings of fatigue, irritability, and restlessness that come with a poor night's sleep, but chronic poor sleep can have lasting negative effects on our physical and mental health.

To date, research efforts have revealed that poor sleep quality and/or quantity can hurt all of the following (the list is hardly exhaustive):

- Our ability to think clearly and make good decisions
- Manage mood issues (including any depression or anxiety)
- Perform to our best socially and academically
- Pay attention, stay focused, and remain on task
- Our physical health and immune system

With almost a third of children (and adults!) experiencing sleep issues, this is a problem that is both common and harmful to individuals AND to entire families as one person not sleeping quite often means multiple people in the home aren't sleeping! Many people might think of seeing a psychologist if they are struggling with anxiety, depression, or stress but you may be



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this means a cool, dark, and quiet bedroom

• Beds are for sleeping only — don't allow your kids to do anything in bed other than to sleep, especially electronics!

• Keep a regular sleep schedule — try not to change times too much on weekends

• Stop trying to fall asleep! If we could actually control sleep, we would just tell ourselves "fall asleep!" and it would work instantly. This also means getting OUT of bed if you're not sleeping and resisting the urge to "rest" or try harder.

If you or someone you know is struggling with a sleep issue and would like to learn more about any of the above strategies, please consider following up with APNS to learn more about how a psychologist may be able to help.

Dr. Daniel Chorney is a Registered Psychologist who works with children, adolescents, and adults in a private practice in Halifax.



We're only now beginning to understand the true consequences of poor sleep in adults and children. **123RF**

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CUSTOM CONTENT

### When sex is painful: There is help

**NATALIE O. ROSEN, PH.D. AND  
KATE RANPCOURT, B.SC.**

Is the pain all in my head? Will I ever enjoy sex? Can my relationship survive this? Most women who suffer from genito-pelvic pain/penetration disorder (GPPPD) will ask themselves these questions as they struggle to cope with this condition.

Women with GPPPD experience pain or an intense fear of pain during sexual intercourse, or a tensing of their pelvic muscles such that penetration becomes difficult or impossible.

Just how many women are affected is unknown, although approximately 15 per cent of North American women report current pain during sexual intercourse.

Genito-pelvic pain can result from underlying gynaecological conditions or events such as childbirth or menopause. However, in many cases there are no identifiable physical causes, leading to a diagnosis of vulvodynia.

The development and maintenance of GPPPD is likely to include biological, psychological, and relational factors.

Regardless of the cause, the experience of painful sex has wide-reaching consequences for women's self-esteem and overall quality of life.

Not surprisingly, affected women commonly report problems in all areas of their sexuality, including lower sexual desire, difficulties with sexual arousal and orgasm, decreased frequency of inter-

course and lower sexual satisfaction.

Given that the pain is usually present during partnered sexual activities, the partners of women with GPPPD also suffer consequences to their sexual and romantic relationships.

There are several treatment options available for GPPPD. A multidisciplinary approach is recommended, and may include medical treatments (e.g. anaesthetic ointments), pelvic floor physiotherapy, and psychotherapy.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) for GPPPD focuses on pain management strategies to reduce pain and to minimize the negative impact of pain on women's sexuality and relationships.

Additionally, this treatment includes sex therapy to promote the experience of pleasurable and satisfying sexual relationships in the context of pain.

Many studies show that this treatment results in decreased pain, and improvements in women's sexual functioning and satisfaction. These changes often remain several years after treatment has ended.

Given that GPPPD affects women and their intimate partners, we (along with collaborators at the Université de Montréal) have recently developed a CBT treatment for couples struggling with vulvodynia.

This couples therapy emphasizes that both partners are affected by and affect the pain, and focuses on couple communication and



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relationship intimacy in addition to pain management and sex therapy.

Our pilot study with nine couples showed that women's pain was reduced, and women and partners' experienced improvements in their sexual satisfaction and psychological well-being.

The Couples and Sexual Health Research Laboratory at Dalhousie University (directed by Dr. Rosen) is committed to improving our understanding of the relationship dynamics that affect women's pain experience and the sexual, relationship, and psychological well-being of both members of the couple, and improving treatment options.

We are currently recruiting couples to participate in a treat-

ment study that will compare our couples CBT to a standard medical treatment for vulvodynia.

For more information on this study, or to learn about our other research projects, some of which also focus on GPPPD, please visit the Couples and Sexual Health Research Laboratory website [www.natalieorosen.com](http://www.natalieorosen.com) or Facebook page [facebook.com/rosenlab](https://www.facebook.com/rosenlab). You will also find additional information on local treatment resources for GPPPD.

Dr. Natalie O. Rosen is a Clinical Psychologist at Dalhousie University and the LWK Health Centre. Kate Ranpcourt is a Ph.D. student of Clinical Psychology working under Dr. Rosen's supervision.

### P.U.R.E. parenting tips

**KIRAN PURE, PH.D.,  
PSYCHOLOGIST**

**Positive parenting:** Be present in your child's life and give them the gift of your time. Praise and encourage him/her immediately, enthusiastically, and often.

**Unconditional respect:** Under all circumstances, your actions should reflect unconditional love and regard for your child.

**Responsibility:** Set clear developmentally appropriate expectations for behaviour to teach your children responsibility for themselves, family, friends, and community.

**Empathy:** Encourage and model for your children participation in activities that promote caring for others and justice and equality.

Dr. Kiran Pure is a clinical psychologist in Dartmouth, with specialty in child, adolescent and family diagnostic, assessment and treatment services.

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**Nova Scotia  
Board of Examiners  
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## 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.

### 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.

**www.nsbep.org**  
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