

CHAPTER FIVE

Picking a Treatment Provider and How to Prepare for a Mental Health Visit

Once you have decided that it is time to go see a professional, there are some things that you should consider to make sure you get the most out of the experience. It is important to know that once you have decided what type of provider you would like to see, you may need a referral from either your nephrologist or your Primary Care Physician.

SELECTING THE RIGHT MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL FOR YOU

Being a skilled mental health provider is both a science and an art, so picking someone you can work with and feel comfortable with is just as important as picking someone with appropriate training and expertise.

CLARIFYING YOUR GOALS FOR TREATMENT

The first step in the process of picking the right provider is knowing your goals for treatment.

- Do you want someone to work on a specific issue you are having?
- Would you like someone that you can talk to about the things going on in your day-to-day life?
- Do you want someone who will use a structured, focused approach or someone who will allow the treatment to run its natural course?
- Are you looking for short-term treatment or someone who will be available to you over the next months and years?

DIFFERENT DEGREES

There is a wide array of provider choices for people looking for mental health treatment. The titles and degrees vary a bit state by state, but here is an overview of the types of providers available. Keep in mind, though, that your

unit Social Worker is an incredible resource with knowledge on local and national providers. This is a good place to start.

PEER MENTORING

Someone with limited formal training, but often has similar life experiences to the groups they work with.

BACHELOR LEVEL CLINICIANS

Someone with a college degree in counseling. Some states have a license for this level clinician while other states require a master's degree to treat patients. Some substance abuse counselors are bachelor level clinicians.

MASTER'S LEVEL CLINICIANS/MASTER'S IN SOCIAL WORK

Requires post graduate training and supervised clinical experience. Clinicians employed at dialysis centers are often master's level clinicians, as are many couples counselors.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Doctoral level clinician. In most states these cannot prescribe medication, but are experts in psychotherapy

PSYCHIATRIST

Went to medical school and then did a residency in psychiatry. They prescribe medication and often combine pharmacology with psychotherapy.

DIFFERENT ORIENTATIONS

In picking a provider it is often helpful to understand his or her professional orientation (model in which they treat patients) to help determine if it will be a good fit for your particular goals.

SUPPORTIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY

This type of treatment is unstructured and is designed to help the patient feel heard and supported. The therapist usually does not have his or her own agenda, but lets the patient focus the session.

PSYCHODYNAMIC PSYCHOTHERAPY

Originally based on the work of Freud, modern psychodynamic psychotherapy often uses unstructured sessions to help the patient become aware of conflicts and patterns in their life.

COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

Highly structured, symptom focused treatment. This has the largest evidence base supporting it, but can be quite challenging work, as the therapist will often have a loose agenda for each session to help the patient reach his or her goal.

ECLECTIC PSYCHOTHERAPY

This is the term therapists use when they don't practice strictly in one orientation, but combine different techniques depending on the needs of the patient.

COMMON BARRIERS TO SUCCESSFUL THERAPY

COST

Can vary widely depending on where you live and the degree of the practitioner you choose. Many mental health professionals accept insurance but many do not accept any insurance at their practice, and the patient pays out of pocket for each session.

TIME

Sessions are usually 30 or 45 minutes long and are commonly once a week, so make sure you budget enough time to devote to treatment.

“Short term treatment” usually runs about 12 sessions (3 months) and some types of therapy do not have a predetermined length.

CONVENIENCE

Getting renal replacement therapy is extremely demanding in many ways, including time, energy and cost. For mental health treatment to work, it is important to pick a modality that does not add too much additional burden. If quality mental health providers are not readily available where you live, you may want to consider having your sessions chair-side, over the phone, or through video-conference.

THERAPIST KNOWLEDGE OF ESRD

Many people, including therapists, know very little about renal disease and its demands. Depending on the nature of your issue, the importance of the therapist having some appreciation of ESRD will vary.

PREPARING FOR YOUR MENTAL HEALTH VISIT

Some people have some anxiety about going to see a mental health professional. While there are many differences in how various practices are organized (as an example, a group clinic is quite different than a private practice), there are some things that most mental health professionals will have in common.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INTAKE AND THERAPY

The first session or two with a new provider is often spent getting background information. This may be quite different than the usual therapy sessions once formal treatment has begun. So it is difficult to get a sense of what treatment will be like with a particular provider from the first sessions.

COMMON QUESTIONS A THERAPIST MAY ASK

Chief complaint - People often have long and complicated life stories, so mental health providers will usually want to know what the main

problem that you are experiencing now is. They may ask *“What brings you in today?”* or some other similar question as an opening question.

Providers will often ask questions about your mental health treatment history such as:

- Have you been in treatment before?
- What kind?
- For what?

They may also ask some general questions about your medical health and any major health problems you are experiencing. There may be questions about:

- your developmental history
- your childhood
- your education

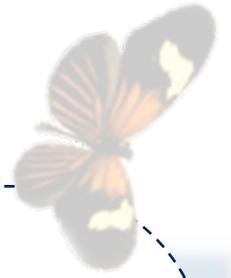
Finally, some mental health practitioners ask questions about:

- Your “mental status”
- A brief overview of your memory attention and other cognitive abilities.

SOME QUESTIONS YOU MAY WANT TO ASK A POTENTIAL MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDER

- It is your right to know the exact cost of each session and what portion, if any, your insurance will cover.
- It is prudent to know what type of license they have, where they went to school and how long they have been in practice.
- It is very reasonable to ask the provider about their experience treating people with similar problems to the one you are seeking help for.
- How long do people usually stay in treatment? What can I expect from treatment?
- What information is shared with your physician and how often will they be in communication with your health care team?

Patient Stories



Larry

Larry was working about eighty miles from home when his kidneys failed with no warning. He was admitted to a hospital through the emergency room. He was far from home and alone. Once his labs were reviewed it was determined he needed to be on dialysis NOW! In the course of three hours his entire world changed. Depression and fear started quickly. His future was no longer controlled by him.

After the first week or so he was told this may be an acute episode. This did raise his spirits a bit. Unfortunately this turned out not to be the case and his diagnosis was changed to ESRD. He was the sole support of his family. He was an over the road truck driver and basically ESRD prohibited this from continuing.

It did take us months to deliver the solutions he needed to get through this ordeal. We made sure he was given all the answers to the questions he had. He received disability payments. He is now part of a Kidney Support Group and doing much better. He is seeing a psychologist on a regular basis and his depression is in check.

PREPARING FOR A MENTAL HEALTH VISIT

Worksheet

- ◆ My primary goal for treatment is (feel less depressed, get better sleep, to drink less, etc.)

- ◆ Consider the factors that are most important to you in a provider (expertise, cost, age, orientation, convenience, etc.)

The qualities that are most important to me in a provider to develop a positive working relationship are:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Be prepared to share the following with your practitioner:

- ◆ The primary reason I am going to treatment today is because I would like help with

- ◆ Briefly describe how long this problem has been going on:

- ◆ Briefly describe how this problem is affecting you (how severe is it):

- ◆ Briefly describe some of the things you have already tried to address the problem:

- ◆ If you have any ideas about what you would like to try (or are not willing to try) that may help, list them here:
