

Counseling Practicum I

Treatment Planning and Intervention

Lecture 7

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Introduction

Most providers, especially those in the mental health field, use treatment plans as blueprints to outline services provided. Mental health treatment plans typically highlight important assessment information, define areas of concern for the client, and establish concrete goals for treatment. Counseling interns are advised to use this powerful professional way of building their profession pathway in counseling practice.

Expected Learning Outcomes

At the end of this lecture, you will be able to:

- Define treatment planning
- Explain the importance of treatment planning in counseling
- Apply treatment planning in counseling and psychotherapy

Definition of Treatment Planning

Treatment planning is a process of documenting client's story during therapy that begins from the intake to termination of therapy. It includes use of documentation tools often considered essential to providing well-rounded health care. The therapist tries to his/her level best to tailor make counseling intervention with available resources to meet the client's needs and expectations for seeking therapy (Kabir , 2017)

Foundations of Treatment Planning

Treatment planning was formalized in the early 1960s in the medical sector and has spread to the entire health sector in the 1970s as clinics, psychiatric hospitals, agencies started seeking accreditation from healthcare bodies to qualify for third party reimbursements. Managed care was made mandatory in the 1980s. Treatment planning in counseling is both a professional practice and client care good practice. The overall aim of counseling intervention is to heal and transform a person with mental health problem to be able to live a meaningful life in the community (Jongsma Jr, Peterson, & Bruce, 2021)

Rationale for Using Treatment Planning

Presenting problems without a treatment include:

- Having vague treatment goals and objectives
- Lack of an appropriate diagnosis
- Misplaced treatment objectives
- Lack of direction and focus
- Unsure of treatment outcome
- Unsure of treatment termination /completion
- Low motivation in the treatment process (both client and therapist)
- Malpractice and premature termination of therapy

Getting Started with Treatment Plans (TPs)

Managed care systems insist that clinicians move swiftly from assessment of the problem to the formulations and implementation of the treatment plan. The aim is to expedite the treatment process by focusing on identifying and changing behavioral problems as fast as possible. TPs must be specific as to the problems and interventions, individualized to meet the client's **Needs** and therapy **Goals**. These ought to be **Measurable** in terms of setting milestones that can be used to map the client's progress (Corey, 2009).

Benefits of Developing TPs

There are several benefits and advantages of developing and using TPs in therapy. They include meeting the requirements by third party payers, accreditation agencies, insurance companies and other outside parties, easy to produce effective, high quality treatment plans in a short time frame, it is a less tedious intervention process, less stress for the client and the therapist, less malpractice, high motivation for therapy attendance and adherence and easy to project treatment outcome (Jongsma Jr, Peterson, & Bruce, 2021).

General Benefits of TPs for the Counselor

TPs will enhance trust in counseling practice, trustworthy relationship between client and therapist, enhance critical and analytical thinking by therapists, easy to apply co-therapy, referral and consultancy, protection in possible legal issues (client and therapist), foster easy communication in case management, TP is simple guide in therapy process plus documentation of case notes is a sure bet for best practice for all clinicians(McLeod, 2013).

Benefits for the Agency/Counseling Industry

The following benefits are realized by counseling agencies and industry: promotion of evidence-based intervention, provides assurance on the effectiveness of counseling, provision of structure and direction in counseling, enhanced self-confidence of the therapist, data collection to promote evidence based clinical research and it is easy to vary intervention treatment based on past experiences (Jongsma Jr, Peterson, & Bruce, 2021).

How Does a Counselor Develop Treatment Plans?

The following are key guiding indicators to developing an effective treatment plan:

- Client's personal information, psychological history, social cultural history, legal history, substance use history
- A diagnosis of the current mental health problem.
- Key treatment goals.
- Measurable objectives.
- A timeline for treatment progress.
- Monitoring and evaluation tools/strategies
- Self-care plan

Before drawing a treatment plan determine if the client will benefit from counseling (suitability for counseling), review intake interview, keep diagnostic and assessment reports and other data about that person with special attention to motivation, characteristics of the person and nature of the problem(Corey, 2009).

Assess Client's Motivation in TP

Ask them some guiding questions like what motivated them to seek counseling, who referred to you or your facility? Please examine the nature of referral, the urgency and magnitude of their problem (difficulties) and precipitating events (triggers). Some clients may not fit your competencies and or treatment approaches, kindly refer appropriately (McLeod, 2013).

Understanding the Nature of Referral

People come for therapy through many referral channels, but self-referred clients are normally self-motivated and mostly have reviewed their personal lives and challenges and seen counseling would help them although they may have unrealistic expectations and barriers to effect change. At times it is another's successful change that motivated them to seeking help. Forced clients can transfer negative energies to the counselor so beware, family referral may be great but also explore expectations and strengthen motivation, referrals from doctors, clergy, lawyer, teacher, other therapist, employer may be taken seriously, court referrals have high extrinsic motivation so just differentiate the same (Jongsma Jr, Peterson, & Bruce, 2021).

A Good Treatment Plan

The foundation of an effective treatment plan is the client's data gathered in a thorough biopsychosocial assessment approach. The steps build on each other logically like constructing a building(Corey, 2009).

The following building blocks apply according to Kabir(Kabir , 2017)&(Jongsma Jr, Peterson, & Bruce, 2021).

i. General Intake Interview

When the client comes to therapy, the clinician must sensitively listen to and understand what the client struggles with in terms of family of origin issues, current stressors, emotional status, social network, physical health, coping skills, interpersonal conflicts, self-esteem among others.

ii. Urgency and Magnitude of The Problem

- Some cases are urgent – alcohol dependence clients, expectant mothers, clients suffering from extreme panic attack, seizures among others. While a client in crisis may be at risk of losing a job (final warning letter), risk of losing a marriage, suicide attempts, careless lifestyle, and other factors. Some low motivation due to negative attitude toward counseling maybe a factor too. If rapport, joint problem identification and goal setting do not work, refer for other services (this is not FAILURE) . It is also good to find other things that are not written here that maybe considered as urgent(Jongsma Jr, Peterson, & Bruce, 2021).

Characteristics of the Client

Most counseling approaches are designed for people who NOT severely impaired in their verbal and intelligent levels, moderately organized in their lives (GAF 60- 70 scale and above because they can follow through their scheduled appointments, agreed tasks, and discuss their concerns. Support systems at times is required though for difficult clients. At times putting crisis clients to inpatient treatment centre, hospital or seeing them at home (where it is inevitable) may help to avoid further harm.(Corey, 2009).

Nature of a Client's Problem

Most common concerns include relationship and communication difficulties, confusion about goals and direction, poor or unclear self-image, one who is indecisive, struggling with troubling behaviors or habits, depression or anxiety difficult coping with change, crisis, or loss (Jongsma Jr, Peterson, & Bruce, 2021). Always know your limits as you do treatment planning for different clients. Some clients may not benefit from counseling, and they include those with severe personality disorder, history of treatment failures, people in denial, those who externalize their difficulties (blame other factors or people), oppositional attitudes (put down the counselor), severe cognitive mental and psychotic disorders (McLeod, 2013).

Specific Steps to Developing a Good TP

The following steps will help an intern or a practicing therapist to develop a good working treatment plan (Jongsma Jr, Peterson, & Bruce, 2021)

- **Step One:** Problem selection (must be primary specific to keep track) secondary problems can be dealt with later but allow the client to join in TP development
- **Step Two:** Problem Definition (use DSM, ICD /11) and back up with past experiences
- **Step Three:** Goal development (measurable treatment statements global, long term goals that indicate a desired positive outcome)

- **Step Four:** Objective construction – SMART objectives at least two objectives for each problem goal (NB: New objectives should be added to the plan)
- **Step Five:** Intervention creation - Based on client's needs, goals and matching therapeutic interventions, counselor's training, and experience
- **Step Six:** Diagnosis Determination

An appropriate diagnosis is based on an evaluation of the client's complete clinical presentation (still use DSM- IV TR Multi axial Diagnostic Criteria)

Conclusion

This lecture has explained what treatment planning all is about, importance and benefits of treatment planning in counseling, factors to consider while developing a good treatment plan and steps to follow when developing treatment plan. It is quite helpful for interns to know how to do treatment planning during practicum to avoid all the pitfalls that follow poor or no treatment plans during therapy.

References

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