



Psychotherapy Guidebook

WHOLISTIC THERAPY

Herbert A. Otto

Wholistic Therapy

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Wholistic Therapy

Herbert A. Otto

DEFINITION

Briefly stated, the wholistic treatment program has seven components and is based on the health model perspective of the person. Using group plus individual sessions, the focus is on working with both the psyche and soma (body work) while actively utilizing all possible resources and vectors in the life space (environment) of the person seeking help. Wholistic Therapy, as its name implies, is a holistic approach to applicable treatment, regardless of the theoretical base (Neo-Freudian, eclectic, etc.) of a particular treatment modality.

HISTORY

This writer's (Herbert A. Otto) interest in the concept of a wholistic treatment program grew from private practice and particularly my work with nonpatient groups as a part of the Human Potentialities Research Project at the University of

Utah (1960- 1967). Based on this work, initial concepts and methods

were developed and subsequently published in a chapter entitled "Toward a Holistic Treatment Program." This appeared in Harold Greenwald's volume *Active Psychotherapy*. A detailed article, "Toward Wholistic Psychotherapy, Counseling and Social Work Treatment Program" is in press.

TECHNIQUE

The wholistic treatment program has seven basic components. They are 1) the health model perspective of the person seeking treatment, 2) combined group and individual treatment, 3) body work, 4) optimum utilization of the life space in the treatment process, 5) working with the belief system, 6) the self-concept, and self-image, and human sexuality as major factors in treatment, 7) emphasis is on a new eclecticism and the expanded therapeutic team. I will briefly describe each of the preceding components.

1. The health model perspective of the person seeking treatment.

The basic thrust of the human organism is seen to be toward health. From this perspective symptom formation is understood to be an expression of need, as well as providing clues to the underlying need structure of the person. Symptom formation, essentially a signal for help, progressively pervades or permeates the process of personality and can become a dominant force. In short, intensification of the symptom (or signaling) system can lead to organism dysfunctioning and exhaustion (and even death). The main function of the symptom system, however,

is to initiate movement toward health by seeking to elicit help and support from the total environment. Finally, it is a message of the individual to himself.

2. Combined group and individual treatment. In the wholistic treatment program, most of the treatment takes place in group therapy with individual sessions scheduled as needed. Group treatment has a number of distinct advantages. The most important are: a) manipulation of the therapist is minimized, b) the function of “authority attitudes,” hostility toward authority, is more easily worked through and minimized, c) in a well-functioning group the resources of participants are brought to bear on the treatment process. The participants are thus exposed to multiple health vectors, d) ego-supportive-self-esteem and self-image-enhancing treatment modalities appear to be more effective in group settings, and, finally, e) group treatment offers significant economy.

3. The use of body work as an integral part of treatment. An important aspect of the wholistic treatment program is the emphasis on treatment of the psyche and soma simultaneously. Today there is some use of “supportive touching” during therapy. The next step is the full utilization of body work modalities as an integral part of treatment. Training in body work systems has become increasingly available. Nevertheless, few professionals have the time to take the training. One way out of this dilemma is to work out a referral arrangement, with a qualified bodywork practitioner, or to add such a person to the professional

team.

4. Optimum utilization of the life space in treatment. This life space consists of the total interpersonal and physical environment of the person seeking help. In the vast majority of instances, aspects of this life space can be used to support and foster therapeutic aims and goals. The wholistic use of the life space, in addition to the utilization of the interpersonal and physical environment also includes use of an Action Program concept (Otto, 1975).

5. Working with the belief system. This involves assessing as well as working with specific components of the belief system of the person seeking help. Emphasis is on: a) assessment of the life-style and life goals, b) exploration of the meaning of existence to the person — including the spiritual resources, or religious belief system, as well as the area of values and attitudes toward death and dying.

6. The self-concept, the self-image, and human sexuality as major factors in treatment. Throughout treatment a clear focus is maintained on the enhancement of the self-concept and self-image. In this connection specific ego-supportive treatment methods are used, such as the Self-image Projection Experience, Strength Acknowledgment, and others (Otto, 1975). Finally, regardless of the type of problem, the wholistic treatment program always includes work in the area of human sexuality, particularly relating to sexual attitudes and the sexual self-image (Otto, 1973).

7. The new eclecticism and the expanded therapeutic team. The hallmark of the new eclecticism is the helping person's acquaintance with a considerable range of theory and treatment modalities drawn from various schools, coupled with a willingness to try out and use diverse treatment methods based on the individual needs of the person seeking help. The expanded therapeutic team also includes the bodywork practitioner and, if possible, a person with proven capacities as a psychic healer.

APPLICATIONS

The wholistic treatment program has application to the broad range of therapeutic treatment modalities utilized by the helping professions. Finally, the wholistic treatment concept is designed to yield maximum treatment benefits through a total approach.