**Getting the Most Out of Psychotherapy Supervision**

**(Resident Edition)**

Psychotherapy supervision in conjunction with your work with patients is your best opportunity to develop as a psychotherapist. Psychotherapy supervision involves a professional relationship between a skilled therapist and a less experienced therapist. It combines feedback, evaluation and instruction and is inherently hierarchical. Effective supervision assures the quality of care being provided and promotes the professional development of the novice psychotherapist. Both the supervisor and the resident must approach it in a deliberate and thoughtful manner for the best outcomes.

**Before Supervision Begins**

* Be proactive
  + Develop a *supervision agreement* with you supervisor. While these may be verbal, they are often more helpful if they are written. They may address:
    - goals and objectives of supervision
    - expectations of the supervisor and supervisee including methods of evaluation
    - Framework of supervision
      * frequency and duration of supervision meetings – usually an hour a week
      * how and when the resident will provide case material to the supervisor (n.b. some supervisors will want to review taped sessions before supervision)
      * emergency procedures such as how to contact the supervisor if there is a crisis
    - Explore the possibility of taping your therapy sessions and reviewing the video or audio tape in supervision. This may be the only time in your career that you will have the opportunity to get direct supervision of your verbal/nonverbal communication in therapy. Some supervisors may not be as comfortable with the video, but if you initiate this discussion it may become an option. Although you will have to get an additional consent from your patient to tape the sessions, the benefits to you and your patients are worth the trouble.

**Before the Supervision Session**

* Be prepared
  + Review your therapy cases for the week before arriving for supervision.
  + Formulate a question you would like answered or an issue you would like to discuss. You can develop these as you review your cases. Here are some good questions to facilitate this process:
    - What did not go as planned? What surprised you in the session? Did your patient do or say something that you did not expect? Did you have a reaction to the patient that surprised you? How do your experiences in providing psychotherapy relate to what you are learning in didactics?

**During the Supervision Session**

* Be diligent
  + Make psychotherapy supervision a top priority in your work week. Many programs will make you keep track of your supervision hours. If they do, keep up to date on your supervision log book
* Be honest
  + Report what happened as accurately as possible. Resist the temptation to present only a partial picture of your clinical work (i.e. only what parts you think went well).
  + If there are clinical or theoretical concepts you don't understand discuss these.
* Be precise
  + Ideally the discussion should focus on unfiltered case material. Video and audio tapes are extremely helpful – many experts see them as the gold standard for supervision. It is scary at first but worth it! If that is not possible then review detailed process notes.
* Be open
  + View your ‘beginner mistakes’ as opportunities for learning and improvement. You should not be competent when you start!
  + The point of supervision is for you to learn things you don't already know. Be willing to accept constructive feedback and to try new things. Accept your supervisor’s praise for what you did well.
* Be intentional
  + You and your supervisor should develop specific learning goals for your supervision. This may involve reading assignments or experiments and reflection.
* Be comprehensive
  + Let your supervisor know what you are learning in didactics or reading about psychotherapy. They should incorporate that knowledge into supervision.
* Be interactive
  + If you do not think you are getting enough feedback or specific suggestions from you supervisor ask for more.
  + Give your supervisor feedback about supervision. What is going well? What could be improved?

**After the Supervision Session**

* Be reflective
  + Write down what you learned during supervision including new knowledge or new ways of doing things.
  + Try your supervisor’s suggestions and note how they seem to work. Bring those back into supervision next time.
* Don't be discouraged
  + Psychotherapy is a skill that takes a lifetime to master. No one expects you to understand it all or do everything perfectly. Even expert therapists benefit from supervision!