Mental health
Educational resources designed for frontline staff

By Tania Haas

A first-of-its-kind, five-part multimedia book series created by two of Mount Sinai’s own is helping clinicians bridge the gap for patients with mental health issues.

Psychotherapy Essentials to Go (WW Norton, 2013) is a series of interactive educational tools for frontline health care workers treating patients with mental health conditions. The series’ editors, Drs. Paula Ravitz, Director, Mount Sinai Hospital Psychotherapy Institute and Morgan Firs-tone Psychotherapy Chair at the University of Toronto, and Robert Maunder, Mount Sinai Psychiatrist and Head of Research in the Department of Psychiatry, wanted to create a resource that took established psychotherapy research off the shelves and into the front pockets of primary health care providers, community health workers and mental health specialists.

“In this series, we’ve put complex ideas into plain language. It is an approach that resonates with learners who have lots of expertise along with those who are new to psychotherapy, regardless of their professional discipline,” says Dr. Ravitz. “The tools in the books are all supported by evidence. We are trying to help patients with common mental disorders to become more resilient, feel better, and manage the stresses of life through psychotherapy.”

Each title includes lesson plans, case studies, role play transcripts and a DVD with captioned demonstrations of therapeutic techniques to help integrate guidelines into patient care. Each case-based learning module enhances a clinician’s ability to help treat anxiety, depression, emotion dysregulation and concurrent substance abuse disorders.

“One of the biggest issues in mental health revolves around access to resources,” says Dr. Mark Fegergrad, Head, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre and co-author of Psychotherapy Essentials to Go: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Depression. He says that while many evidence-based psychotherapeutic interventions have been incorporated into national treatment guidelines, not enough mental health professionals are trained in these modalities. As a result, there are substantial wait times in most centres across Canada.

In fact, the series launched on the heels of a study that highlighted the growing need for mental health care in the country. In September 2013, Statistics Canada reported that 20 per cent of Canadians reported getting no help for mental health

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care in the past year, while 16 per cent said their needs were only partly met. Overall, one in six Canadians believed they needed mental healthcare in the past year. Furthermore, counselling was mentioned as the highest unmet mental health need.

“These books are intended to help alleviate this problem,” says Dr. Fefergrad, who is also Director of Postgraduate Medical Education, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry, University of Toronto.

“The book series represents a wonderful example of using an evidence-based teaching tool to disseminate evidence-based treatments. The users of the books can then provide effective treatments to people suffering from mental illness across the country.”

A first-of-its-kind, five-part multimedia book series created by two of Mount Sinai’s own is helping clinicians bridge the gap for patients with mental health issues.

Drs. Maunder and Ravitz agree that the books are another way to support health care training and continuing education so the best care is provided to patients in both urban and under-serviced rural areas.

Some of the materials have already been used by health care workers in community mental health clinics in Northern Ontario (funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health), where the books helped improve access to professional development for mental health providers. They also helped foster collaboration between mental health experts and front-line community mental health services through an interprofessional knowledge exchange program.

Feedback from the Northern Ontario Focus groups has been overwhelmingly positive. Participants reported an improved sense of self-efficacy in their professional roles and the confidence in acquiring new skills to expand their therapeutic repertoire.

Other participants said the work-based small-group learning format fostered cohesion and collegiality with their colleagues. The books are also being adapted and used in Ethiopia as part of a global mental health project for improving patient outcomes in low- and middle-income countries. The Psychotherapy Essentials To-Go series is available online or at bookstores across the country. The books are sold as a set or separately: (1) Cognitive-behavioral Therapy for Depression, (2) Cognitive-behavioral Therapy for Anxiety, (3) Interpersonal Therapy for Depression, (4) Motivational Interviewing for Co-morbid Disorders, and (5) Dialectical Behavioral Therapy for Affect Dysregulation.

— Tania Haan is a freelance writer.

Psychotherapy Essentials to Go contributors, (front row, L to R) Wayne Skinner, Dr. Mark Fefergrad, Carolynne Cooper (back row, L to R) Shelley McMain, Drs. Priya Watson, Paula Ravitz and Bob Maunder.

Testimonial from MA (Leadership) Alumni – Elaine Shantz, Chief Operating Officer, peopleCare Inc.

For Elaine Shantz, one of the greatest feelings of accomplishment in her life came when she graduated from the University of Guelph’s MA Leadership program.

Scaling new heights in both her career and life isn’t something all that new. She jokes that she’s “lived three separate lives” enjoying successful careers in hospitality, banking and senior care while holding senior level positions.

“I really had to overcome this fear... But I have to say everything I took in the program was applicable, in fact it was fantastic - it’s the best thing I could have done for where I was at.”

Now, Shantz works for peopleCare Inc., as the Chief Operating Officer, an organization that owns and operates seven long-term care homes across Ontario.

Shantz says that even with an accomplished career, she never quite lost sight of going back to school and saw the MA Leadership program at the University of Guelph as an opportunity to bring her own experience as a leader together with practical theory and techniques. Despite some early nervousness, Shantz says she soon found her footing in the program and never looked back from there.

“I really had to overcome this fear of not being able to do it,” she says. “But I have to say everything I took in the program was applicable, in fact it was fantastic - it’s the best thing I could have done for where I was at.”

The MA Leadership course is unique online degree catering to senior-level professionals in both public and private organizations. The course begins with fundamental ideas and philosophies of leadership, before moving on to more applied leadership principles and management techniques. Each course pushes students to make direct links to their own careers.

Other courses cover concepts such as change management, show students how to successfully transition in today’s business world from one career to another as well as move their own organizations towards a desired end goal.

For more information contact Patti Lago at pla-g0@uoguelph.ca or toll free at 1-888-622-2474.