



# A Public Service Column for Members: A Look At Wellness

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Currently Dr. Snipes serves as the Chief Executive Officer and Clinical Director for Dawn-Elise Enterprises, Inc. which has grown over the past few years to include three companies: Affordable Wellness, The Addictions Counseling Alliance and Police-Counseling.com. In addition to her private practice, she has worked for two years as the Clinical Director of a large multi-level substance abuse and mental health treatment facility in Gainesville, Florida.

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*PBA wishes to express appreciation to Dr. Snipes for contributing this helpful column for the benefit of our members.*

## Multidimensional Brief Solution Focused Consultation

Over the past decade, consultants and researchers alike have become aware of the interactive nature of people, emotions, health and motivation. When people make changes in one aspect of themselves, it results in changes in all other areas. Take, for example, depression. As people start to feel better, they begin to see improvements in their relationships, have more energy and sleep better, which all further act to relieve their depression. Likewise, making a negative change produces negative systemic results. Think about addiction. When a person starts abusing substances or engaging in other behaviors to escape from a problem, it starts a cascade effect of problems at work, with their health and in their relationships.

A new technique called Multidimensional Brief Solution Focused Consultation (MBSFC) capitalizes on this synergistic effect by helping people assess their strengths, goals and current opportunities for growth (problems) in all areas, identify which goals or opportunities they are motivated to work on, develop a set of treatment options and create and implement an effective change plan. This process begins with reframing problems as opportunities for growth (challenges) and identifying strengths people already have, which instills a sense of hope. People with hope tend to be more committed to achieving their goals, have a greater sense that they can achieve their goals (control/self-efficacy), and have a willingness to view "problems" as "challenges."

Once people have identified the challenge, the solution focused nature of this method helps people look at their strengths and generate "exceptions" to their problem. We know that no voluntary behavior occurs 24/7. Therefore, to reduce a negative behavior, people need to identify times when the behavior is not occurring (exceptions). For example, when I worked with Juvenile Drug Court, one of the hallmarks of the program was having the youth participate in adult-supervised, prosocial activities several hours per week. They were much less likely to sell or use drugs in these situations. Since you cannot do both things at the same time, by increasing the "exceptions" you naturally decrease the problem behavior. Of course, if the person is *not* doing the behavior *only* when he is sleeping, he is not going to sleep all the time.

A general rule is to have clients generate three to five exceptions for every "problem." After that, people can focus on what is different during the exceptions and generate additional exceptions or tools to meet their goals. Take for example comfort eating. What are three things someone could do that do not involve eating? Going on a walk. Doing some sort of craft (sewing, woodworking etc). Swimming or sitting in the hot tub. Talking on the phone. Any or all of these can be used as exceptions to reduce comfort-eating.

These techniques produce rapid improvement which helps increase optimism, commitment and hope that a better quality of life is possible. So why do you care? Co-occurring disorders are the rule not the exception these days. A staggering number of people (including your family, co-workers and criminals) are addicted to something in addition to having anxiety, depression, eating disorders,

posttraumatic stress or bipolar disorder. Unless we address the whole person, we are going to leave huge gaps in the recovery picture leading to relapse, recidivism and health and mental health complications. Fortunately, many of these issues can be addressed simultaneously.

Take for example "stinkin' thinkin'." This is a casual term that often represents irrational thoughts and cognitive distortions. Ah-ha. What is one of the biggest problems of people with addictions, depression or anxiety? You've got it. Irrational thoughts and cognitive distortions. By developing ways to deal with and change their irrational thoughts and cognitive distortions, they reduce their need to escape through their addiction, and reduce their anxiety and/or depression. This produces a more

positive attitude, improves energy during the day, sleep at night, and reduces comfort eating and substance abuse.

However, not everyone is ready, willing or able to address their thinking patterns. This is where the beauty of MBSFC shines through. People have a problem in their lives. By identifying ways to improve in any area of their life, it is going to positively impact all of their problems. Many people who are depressed or stressed out self-medicate with alcohol, drugs, food, gambling or sex. All of these things temporarily provide relief from their

misery. The more depressed they are, the more they try to escape. The more they try to escape, the more problems they create in their lives, making the depression worse. Have people choose something they are willing to do to feel better: Start exercising, start hanging out with supportive friends more, start taking antidepressants... There are many places to start. The point is that once a person starts to make positive changes, it will influence other areas of their life. How many people are physically fit, depressed and addicted at the same time?

Further, if we look at the work of **Abraham Maslow**, we learn that until they are getting their basic needs for safety, security, health and belonging at least mostly met, they do not really have the ability to focus on more abstract things like self-esteem and automatic thoughts. MBSFC consultants first help people identify ways to meet those basic needs which leads to increases in self-esteem, energy and motivation to address other challenges. If you know someone who is trying to make a change, help them focus on the basics. Eat well. Get plenty of rest. Find time for relaxation. Develop relationships with positive people. Increase alternatives (exceptions) to the negative behavior. Finally, put on those rose-colored glasses, and see life as full of challenges and opportunities instead of obstacles and road-blocks. ■



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