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Book Review

‘Overcoming Pathological Gambling: Therapist Guide’

Robert Ladouceur and Stella Lachance

Oxford University Press, New York, 2006

Although gambling is not a new phenomenon, pathological gambling has only been relatively recently recognised as a significant disorder requiring appropriate treatment. Currently, despite numerous international studies suggesting lifetime prevalence rates of approximately 1% to 2% (Productivity Commission, 1999; National Research Council; 1999; Ladouceur *et al.*, 2005), annual social costs estimated to range from AUD\$1.8 to \$5.6 billion (Productivity Commission, 1999), and the substantial distress caused to individuals and families, pathological gambling often remains undetected and untreated for a considerable length of time. This book, the *Therapist Guide* presents an overview of a treatment program developed by a highly experienced team of clinicians to assist pathological gamblers in overcoming their problem and dealing effectively with the consequences. It aims to provide a clear and concise session guide for problem gambling clients encompassing the key treatment components utilizing a cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) model.

The *Therapist Guide* begins by providing a description of problem gambling and the treatment program components including a review of the empirical support for this mode of therapy. This section is very brief and, as the book is aimed at therapists who do not have extensive experience dealing with problem gambling clients, it would have been useful to have provided a more detailed review of theoretical models and additional background information for the reader. However, each chapter/session guide includes an overview of some of the issues and difficulties experienced by gamblers and rationale for therapeutic techniques. For example, the sessions on cognitive interventions provide an outline of common irrational beliefs including misunderstanding the independence of independent events, illusions of control, and superstitious beliefs. This allows therapists a greater understanding of the mechanisms maintaining pathological gambling to enable them to work more effectively with their clients.

Beginning with the pre-treatment assessment, each proceeding chapter is clearly structured and formatted. Each session description includes an overview of the objectives and materials required, a rationale and description of treatment components, suggested ways to discuss these with clients, and homework to be assigned between sessions. Graphics are utilized well and include examples of completed exercises, questionnaires and figures to assist in describing principles to clients. The authors acknowledge that this book is best suited to a therapist with previous training and understanding of the principles of CBT and how these should be applied in a therapeutic context. The manual effectively demonstrates how these principles can be utilized with problem gambling

clients and the treatment is structured to include motivational enhancement, behavioural interventions, cognitive interventions, and relapse prevention.

One value added element is the authors inclusion of a chapter on difficulties that may arise in therapy including client's refusal or inability to shift their irrational beliefs, lack of cooperation and lying, missing appointments, financial difficulties, depression and suicide and the therapist's ignorance of games. Vignettes and some clinical suggestions are provided to assist therapists in overcoming these difficulties. While this chapter is useful, it should be highlighted that problem gambling clients often present with comorbid issues and therapy is rarely, if ever, as straightforward as the manual presents. The *Therapist Guide* provides an ideal step-by-step approach to therapy which does not include a comprehensive guide for managing the myriad of complications and problems that may arise during therapy and disrupt the sequence of sessions. Though this may be beyond the scope of this book, it should be highlighted for professionals intending to work with problem gamblers.

The *Therapist Guide* is intended to be used simultaneously with a workbook provided to clients containing relevant educational materials, worksheets, exercises and monitoring forms. To be utilized in this way each client must purchase, or be provided with a copy of the workbook, which may pose additional financial burdens to clients and service providers. Despite this and other matters mentioned, the *Therapist Guide* provides an extremely useful overview for working with problem gamblers in a clinical setting including practical treatment components and strategies. It would be most useful for professionals trained in CBT who may encounter clients with gambling problems, but who are not familiar with this field. Given the high rates of comorbidity between problem gambling and other psychological disorders, all mental health workers should routinely screen for possible gambling problems and be equipped to deal with these. The *Therapist Guide* provides a useful resource to allow trained professionals to develop their existing skills to assist individuals overcome their gambling problems.

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