

# **An Analysis of the Appropriateness and Effectiveness of the Phenomenological-Existential and Process-work Approach to Treating the Experience of Forgetfulness in Elders at Pacific Institute Senior Communities Residential Treatment Facility**

A Preliminary Research Proposal by Puran Khalsa and Matt Spalding

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Research Objectives

#### 1. Purpose/Goal

The purpose of this study is to discern and assess the unique and effective components of the phenomenological-existential and process-work approach\* to the clinical treatment of elders with forgetfulness in the Pacific Institute Senior Communities residential treatment facility in San Francisco, CA.

#### 2. Specific Aims

1. To identify the uniquely appropriate and effective therapeutic attributes, attitudes, interventions, and conceptualizing strategies utilized by Pacific Institute intern therapists with the resident population and their experience of forgetfulness, as evidenced by symptom criteria that include impairment in memory, language, decision-making ability, judgment, attention, and/or other areas of mental function.
2. To identify the unique interventions germane to the Phenomenological-Existential and Process-Work approach as promoted by Pacific Institute in service of the effective clinical treatment of this population.
3. To recommend optimal ways to integrate and replicate the composite findings of the above two aims in diverse clinical settings to further promote the empirical validity of this alternative treatment approach.

### B. Relevance Statement

1. There has been a paucity of research supporting the relevance and effectiveness of alternative therapeutic approaches to working with forgetfulness. This study initially addresses the concern that few such alternative treatment approaches have been adequately documented and cited in the research literature, thus discouraging the availability and recommendation of alternative treatment modalities to this population. Information from this study will thus assist traditional therapeutic approaches in learning more about the effectiveness of alternative modalities to working with forgetfulness in the aim of

offering more comprehensive and integrative services to this client population.

2. The specific Phenomenological-Existential and Process-work approach to addressing the experience of forgetfulness represents a unique contribution to such alternative therapeutic modalities. This approach assumes there to be a subjective experience of meaning-making inherent to the condition of forgetfulness which can be best be interpreted, accessed and supported through this particular humanistic lens of inquiry and support. It also assumes that therapy with this population is relevant both in terms of support and potential rehabilitation of seemingly atrophied or lost cognitive and affective capacities.
3. This study will investigate several possible advantages of the Phenomenological-Existential and Process-work approach and Pacific Institute interns' unique interpretation and application of this clinical approach over conventional "medical model"-oriented treatment modalities. These advantages may include cost efficiency, reduced risk of therapist burnout, amelioration of potentially harmful therapeutic side effects for clients, unique relief of prominent psychological and physical symptoms of forgetfulness, and assisting patients in cultivating a sense of mastery, acceptance and enhanced quality of life while living with symptoms of forgetfulness.
4. Results of this study will provide data for further assessment of the appropriateness and efficacy of existent conventional and alternative treatment modalities with this clinical population. Such findings may potentially leading to the replication and/or generalizability of the Phenomenological-Existential and Process-work treatment approach in other facilities and serving as a guide for future research initiatives.

## II. METHODS, PROCEDURES & DESIGN:

A. Methodology: We will employ a qualitative research methodology known as thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1999) to identify effective and appropriate clinical theory and practice, evidenced by therapist attributes, attitudes, interventions, clinical conceptualizations in service of treating the resident population under consideration.

### B. Interview Questions:

#### *I. Pre: Before (Prescriptive)*

1. What inspired or motivated you to work as an intern at Pacific Institute?
2. What assumptions did you have about working with this therapeutic population before beginning to meet with your clients?

#### *II. Mid: During (Descriptive)*

## **I. THEORETICAL FORMULATION (THINKING/COGNITIVE/FRAMING)**

1. What do you think your clients most wants or needs from therapy?
2. How do you perceive your role in helping your clients to achieve their goals in treatment?
3. What are your perceptions of the possibility or potential of treatment with your clients?
4. How do you perceive the nature or dynamic of the therapeutic relationship that enables these goals to be met?
5. How would you define your therapeutic orientation or modality and what does that look like in a session?
6. What do you perceive as evidence of effective therapy with your clients?
7. What would it look like to realize your goals in treatment with your clients?

## **II. ORIENTING STANCES & ATTITUDES (BEING/AFFECTIVE)**

1. What skills or capacities do you feel you bring to working effectively with this population?
2. Which of these skills or capacities do you feel to be innate?
3. Which of these skills or capacities do you feel you have acquired or developed since working with this population?
4. Do you feel you have gained access to new therapeutic capacities or skills as a result of working with this population?
5. Are there specific ways in which you prepare yourself for each therapeutic session? If so, what do you do?
6. Are their particular attitudes or stances you embody that are best suited for effective treatment? If so, what are they?
7. What seems to interfere with or inhibit these embodied capacities?
8. How would you describe your personal limitations to providing effective treatment with this population?

## **III. THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS (DOING/BEHAVIORAL)**

1. What strategies and interventions do you feel have been particularly effective in providing effective treatment?
2. What have been some of your greatest surprises or unexpected occurrences in therapy with this population?
3. What have been some of your greatest successes in therapy with this population?
4. What have been some of your greatest struggles or challenges in therapy with this population?

*III. Post: After (Reflective)*

1. How has your understanding of or approach to your therapeutic work changed so far with your clients?
2. How do you feel you have changed as a therapist in your therapeutic work so far with your clients?
3. How has what you have done in therapy changed over the course of your work so far with your clients?
4. How do you feel your client has benefited as a result of working with you?
5. How has your therapeutic work been influenced by clinical trainings or supervision at Pacific Institute?

#### C. Project Timeline: February 1-August 15, 2008

1. Formal Proposal Write-up: Feb 1-March 15, 2008
2. Data Gathering: March 16-April 30, 2008
2. Data Analysis: May 1-June 30, 2008
3. Interpretation & Dissemination of Findings: July 1–Aug 15, 2008

#### D. Procedures for Subject Recruitment

1. Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria: 16 Residents (one resident from each intern's caseload) will be selected to participate in the study based upon their capacity to be orientated to time and place according to the 18-question WIMS Information and Orientation questionnaire.
2. All 16 Pacific Institute masters and doctoral level interns will be recruited for this study along with their respective supervisors.
3. Informed Consent and Confidentiality Protocol
  - a. Prior to obtaining participant consent, participants will be informed as to the methods and procedures to be followed with an emphasis on implications for subjects' experiences, highlighting any risks that may be involved because of the study protocol. No costs or compensation will be offered to participants of this study.
  - b. Participants will be informed that they have the option of withdrawing from the research study at anytime without penalty.

#### C. Participant Involvement

Interview subjects will include all 16 current pre-doctoral and postdoctoral

interns (11 female, 5 male) at Pacific Institute who have been working with their clients for at least 6 months. All identifying participant information will remain confidential.

#### IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Background: Review prominent mainstream research studies highlighting effective and appropriate therapeutic outcomes in treating symptoms related to forgetfulness in elderly populations. Review alternative research studies highlighting effective and appropriate therapeutic outcomes in treating symptoms related to forgetfulness in elderly populations.

B. Review literature on use of the Phenomenological-Existential and Process-work therapeutic approaches in clinical practice.

C. Theoretical framework of thematic analysis qualitative research methodology.

\* Interns and trainees from both the are trained in the phenomenological-existential and process-work approach within which they are encouraged to develop and grow their own style of care and clinical support. Process Work is based on the research of Arnold and Amy Mindell and colleagues. It is a cross-disciplinary approach to supporting individuals and groups to discover themselves, and to discover the meaning and creative insights within the conflicts they face. (<http://www.processwork.org/>) Definition of phenomenological-existential approach to follow.