

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CLIENTS WITH POOR MENTAL HEALTH

Katy Lassetter highlights the signs of poor mental health and how you can spot them to enhance your clients' experiences

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Every year, mental health problems impact one in four of us in England¹. Did you know that five of the 10 leading causes of disability worldwide are related to poor mental health²? Accessibility for clients with poor mental health is key if you want to run a successful practice.

TYPES OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the five mental health problems that cause disability are major depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorders, alcohol use and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). But mental health problems are far wider ranging, and lack of awareness can impact the treatment of clients who suffer in silence.

With advice on more than 30 conditions online, the mental health charity Mind considers mental health problems to encompass everything from anger, Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) and eating problems to hoarding, loneliness and paranoia, as well as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) and sleep problems.

"I find joining fitness classes and accessing a range of treatments help engage my body and spirituality. But that's not come without obstacles. The issue is that my conditions are invisible and lack awareness," says Sharon Michelle Brisley-Moore, author of *Over Catastrophising Daily*. "It's difficult to see a client's internal suffering. However, picking up on signals and knowing how to help them beyond your basic offer can make a difference."

HOW TO SPOT THE SIGNS

When speaking to Sharon Michelle Brisley-Moore about her experience living with OCD and high-functioning anxiety for over 30 years, I discovered that the following are typical indications that a client is suffering with poor mental health:

Verbal clues:

- Putting themselves down
- Asking lots of questions and over clarifying
- Seeking reassurance and praise
- Over apologising
- Quick speech (when nervous)
- Slurred speech (when chronically fatigued)

Non-verbal clues:

- Shakes and hand tremors
- Sweating body and wet-looking hairline
- Pale or flushed appearance
- Slow heavy movements
- Alert body posture (rigid or fidgety)

- Self-harm markings
- Sore fingernails/cuticles from picking
- Slow-healing wounds
- Withdrawn behaviour
- Forgetfulness – missed appointments
- Regular illness and cancelled appointments

Many behaviours could signal poor mental health. However, as St John Ambulance points out, we all demonstrate one or more of these behaviours at some stage so they need to be compared to an individual's usual state.

The relation of these clues to poor mental health conditions comes down to how long they last, as well as how frequent and severe they are³. Unless you know your client well, these signs may be lost on you.

What's the takeaway? If you suspect a client has a mental health condition, treat them with respect and actively listen when they wish to suggest a way you could improve their treatment experience.

While any wasted time costs you money, remember that forgotten and missed appointments are often beyond a client's control when consumed by poor mental health.

Once, I was 15 minutes late to an appointment. I apologised, but the therapist told me off (loudly) in the waiting room. What did this achieve? He wasted more time. I felt ashamed, guilty and worthless. I didn't return for further treatment.

What should he have done? He could have calmly asked why I was late to discover I'd written down the wrong time and that their booking process could be improved. Had I received an email appointment confirmation or text reminder, this horrible scene wouldn't have played out.

HOW TO SOOTHE OR AWAKEN THE SENSES

Self-care is one of the best improvements people suffering from poor mental health can make. The Mental Health Foundation⁴ offers tips backed by research that can also be transferred to the treatment room:

Nature nurture – I connect with nature to manage my mental health, and its power to nurture the mind has been proven time and again. Why don't you bring the calming effects indoors? Whether you play the soothing sounds of birdsong or embrace the aromatherapy of essential oils, there's plenty you can do to awaken the senses.

Sleep support – Trouble drifting off is common for people with poor mental health. While you won't be there at bedtime, you can help relax the body and mind to prepare them for sleep. Research shows that acupuncture, for example, can not only regulate yin and yang