

# Psychotherapy is investment in mental happiness



By James L. Dean  
NU School of Journalism

There is probably not a person in the world that does not experience some anxiety.

The way a person deals with that anxiety may be one of the most important things in his life, according to Dr. James Wengert, psychiatric consultant at the University of Nebraska Mental Hygiene Clinic.

"Anxieties are a common problem," he said. "The most important thing is how to handle them. One way is to develop a neurosis."

According to Wengert, a neurosis is a way of ignoring reality.

Wengert is also a fourth year resident at the Nebraska Psychiatric Institute in Omaha. His favorite area of work is with young people of college age.

**ASKED WHAT PSYCHOTHERAPY** is, he quickly pointed out that it is not psychoanalysis.

"The couch bit and free association techniques are confined mainly to the rich," he said. "I don't think there is an analyst of this type between Chicago and Denver."

Psychoanalysis, which utilizes the couch and free association, was devised by Sigmund Freud in the late 19th century.

"Freud's first followers parted company with him on the sexual aggression hang-up on which he had based the cause of neurosis," Wengert said. "Freud gave us the technique which in turn gave us a point of departure. For example, we wouldn't fly in the Wright brother's airplane but somebody had to start somewhere."

Why do people want psychotherapy, There

are many reasons, according to Wengert, such as anxiety, depression or alienation.

One of the main reasons young people start taking therapy is because of an identity crisis. This crisis evolves from confusion about the sexual and moral codes or the choice of a vocation.

**"EARLY BLACK** and white ideas become confused. The youth must choose between intimacy and isolation," Wengert said. "If the youth has conflicts, with his parents, he must resolve them."

According to Wengert, it is only natural that a youth should have conflicts with his parents.

"We learn who we are from our parents. At the time of adolescence these ideas must be reconsidered," he said.

He believes that a young person who accepts all of his parents' ideas or none of them has a problem.

"Perhaps one of life's worst dilemmas is for a young person to see that his parents are not living up to the code which they have outlined," he said.

Although there are no specific guidelines for psychotherapy, some general guidelines are usually followed.

**THE FIRST CONTACT** a client makes with the therapist is the intake interview. This interview may be preceded by some form of standardized test.

"The intake interview is a systematic way of collecting information. At the same time, it is therapeutic," Wengert said.

It helps the client gain some introspection and creates a frame of mind. Someone is according him the respect of being seriously interested in him. And, importantly, there is a non-critical listener, he continued.

"The client tells about the problem that is bothering him. You get some idea of the past situation in a biographical way and some basic idea of how the person is affected by the past."

What happens after this initial interview depends on the orientation of the individual therapist. But, according to Wengert, some kind of a relationship is established between the client and the therapist.

**"PERHAPS THE CLIENT** will come to relate to the therapist as if he were someone much like his father or mother," Wengert said.

"You try to point out a pattern to the client. It is almost certain that the client will relate to the therapist just like he relates to others. But rapport is necessary."

"Points cannot be brought up to some clients without hurting them."

"You don't always need to know the causes of behavior. The change in behavior is probably the most important factor."

When is therapy no longer of value or necessary?

According to Wengert, probably the best criteria is when the client becomes more comfortable with himself.

Hopefully, the decision to discontinue therapy will be a mutual one, he said. There should be a resolution of conflicts — though no one is every totally free from conflict.

**WENGERT BELIEVES** therapy can be viewed as an investment.

"It can give the rigid person the ability

to view things abstractly and at the same time it can give the flighty person some rigidity," he said.

Wengert believes the public is under the influence of some stereotypes about psychiatrists and psychiatry.

"I think it is important for the public to understand psychiatry and to lose the basically wrong ideas that they have about psychiatry. The psychiatrist seen on television is more of a stereotype than a human being with whom people can relate."

The real psychiatrist is a non-critical listener with an insight into human behavior. He ran support healthy behavior and help change unhealthy behavior, Wengert said.

"He helps the person himself to come to his own conclusions about adapting to healthy behavior," he added.

**ASKED IF A PERSON** has to be sick to go into therapy, Wengert's terse reply was "Hell no!"

"You don't have to be 'crazy' to see a psychiatrist," he said. "A person who finds himself ruminating about something all the time can greatly benefit from therapy."

One such person who believed therapy would be helpful was a young woman who will be referred to as Julia.

Julia, now 23, was born in a small midwestern city of about 15,000. She was an only child in a stable middle-class family.

She attended a parochial grade school and a public high school. Then she went on to college and earned a master's degree. According to her own estimate, she was a hard working student, who got above average grades.

When Julia was 22, she left home for a job in a city somewhat larger than her home town.

Asked why she went into therapy, she said, "I was anxious too much of the time."

**"I COULDN'T GET** work and other responsibilities off my mind so I could enjoy myself. Some nights I couldn't go to sleep and some mornings I woke up thinking and worrying too much about the things I had to do that day."

Julia entered therapy three months after she took her job. She described herself as being tense and anxious in her first few appointments and said that she had difficulty talking to the therapist.

"I talked about little problems that worried me. It gave me momentary relief which gradually freed me to talk about more significant issues. The most immediate relief was from making the decision to start therapy and being able to tell my problems to someone," she said.

Entering into any kind of relationship will have some effect on a person's life. A therapy relationship will have much more effect than many others, according to Julia.

"I did better all the way around. I saw problems more realistically and solved them more realistically."

**"THERE WAS MORE** relaxation and I was

able to do more things. If I was worried about something, I knew I would be able to get to the bottom of it."

"I began to quit taking things so seriously, and I learned to say no to people. In the past I had sometimes let people take advantage of me because I could not say no," she said.

Julia added that she was better able to get along with her supervisors at work and with men. She was more tolerant of her own mistakes and was better able to understand when and why she was angry with people, she said.

Family relations, as pointed out by Wengert, are often a source of trouble. Julia said therapy helped in solving and understanding troubles that she had with her family.

Another direct source of satisfaction, according to Julia, was an improved work capacity. She believes this is related to a lessening of certain inhibitions which she had.

**IN ADDITION TO** the changed attitudes of the person in therapy there are changed attitudes in the people who know the client.

Julia said that when her family learned she was in therapy, "There was a resistance . . . They pumped me to find out what it might have to do with them."

"My therapy was regarded as an indication that there was something seriously wrong with me."

"I think it's unfortunate that most people see psychiatric help as a last resort rather than as a means to live more completely."

"Not only did I mature more rapidly with therapy than I would have without it, but I got rid of excess emotional baggage that I would have had to drag along with me the rest of my life."

Julia was in therapy for about a year and a half. The cost of the therapy was about \$30 weekly or about \$2,000.

**THE AMOUNT CHARGED** varies from place to place. Generally it is on an interview basis with the interview lasting about 50 minutes.

Julia has no regrets about the money she spent. It is also tax deductible. "The money spent was an investment in my mental health and future happiness."



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