

The Client - Sapna

Sapna, of Indian origins had lived in Uganda until coming to the UK as a child. She is 52 years old, married to a Scottish man, Alec. They live in the Orkneys, a Scottish island. She does not work. She went to her doctor requesting help for her depression and panic attacks. Sapna has been more or less a weekly attender at the doctor's practice for the last 10 years, since she moved to the area, with a wide variety of symptoms, none of them life threatening. The doctor has exhausted all physical tests.

What her doctor doesn't know or discover is that Sapna has been physically and sexually abused throughout her childhood by her mother who wanted only a boy. She has struggled throughout her life with night terrors and depression and has made several suicide attempts. She is not suicidal at the moment, just very distressed. She also has had some NHS (state) based in-person psychoanalytic psychotherapy which she found interesting but it did not move her forward in any meaningful way. She has a very supportive husband who is perplexed by her problems, and three young children whom she adores but finds difficult to look after when in her blackest moments. She has been on Paroxetineⁱ, an anti-depressant, for 6 months which she has found helpful, but she is keen not to stay on it for ever. It has enabled her to be stable enough to look at the underlying issues.

The doctor is at a loss as to what to do with her and has referred her on to your locally contracted counselling service which has spaces for working online. The online service can offer 6 sessions initially, but this can be continued if needed. She was given a choice of formats - **video conferencing, email or instant messaging (IM)**. She chose IM but was open to other formats. The service is flexible enough to be able to allow clients to change between formats if they wish.

You – the online counsellor

As an online therapist how might you want to work with Sapna?

I am specifically interested in what *your modality* (the therapeutic model that you use, for example, Jungian or Humanistic) might have to offer Sapna in an online setting, and the theoretical underpinning to your choice of how to work, and if necessary, what you may have done to adapt to working online.

How you might approach working with Sapna online in a general way?

TASK: Create part of a text-based session to demonstrate this.ⁱⁱ

How might you work specifically with Sapna?

Think about *strategies* (such an uncomfortable word for some psychotherapists!), *tools* (apps, support materials etc), *length* and *timing* of the work.

Is it *relational* based or *problem* focused?

For *you*, what is the most important element in terms of how a client might find the therapy useful?

What do you think might be the best format for Sapna?

Sapna has chosen IM. Do you think she might benefit from a *different format*, eg email or video-conferencing, rather than instant messaging?

Who chooses how you work?

Do you know the *research* around this? (e.g. Simpson et al, University of South Australia)

What are your contractual arrangements with her?

How did you sort these out? How did you answer all her questions? How did you give her all the information she needed? Would you have done a written contract? How much did you need to know about her “therapeutically” before starting the work? How did you think about assessment? Be blunt, do you think you can help her online or would it be “better” face to face? What happens if the technology doesn't work?

What about you?

Are you the right person for her? Have you got the right training and experience? Have you got the right supervision in place? Can you deal with complex cases like this?

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NOTES

ⁱ USES: Paroxetine is used to treat depression, panic attacks, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), anxiety disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder. It works by helping to restore the balance of a certain natural substance (serotonin) in the brain. Paroxetine is known as a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI). This medication may improve your mood, sleep, appetite, and energy level and may help restore your interest in daily living. It may decrease fear, anxiety, unwanted thoughts, and the number of panic attacks. It may also reduce the urge to perform repeated tasks (compulsions such as hand-washing, counting, and checking) that interfere with daily living.

ⁱⁱ me: have I done OK on my summary?

Client: yes

me:and where does that take you?

Client: i was just thinking to myself i wonder what my father or my grandma would think if they read these transcripts

Client: whether they would be able to be honest with themselves or whether they would laugh a bit and think crazy girl

me: or just maybe they would be horrified at how cruel they had been

Client: i think perhaps my dad might

Client: hes changed a lot over the years

me: not having proper clothes is cruel

Client: i was teased about it

me: i am sure ... it must have been terrible

Client: im tall as well so as i grew it was quite obvious

Client: got detention for having a short skirt

Client: wasn't a lot i could do about it

me: and maybe your father was grieving for your mum a lot and couldn't deal with everything just an idea

me: no you were a child you shouldn't even have to think about it

— 2:25pm on 7/8/2014

me: i wonder if this week you might write a letter to them (do not send it!) replying to your grandmother's letter or just to your grandmother, whichever seems right to you

Client: ok

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