

# **Building Effective Therapeutic Partnerships: The Most Important Evidence-Based Practice**

## Introduction

During the past few years the field of Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) has increased its focus on Evidenced Based Practices (EBP). These include Motivational Interviewing (MI), Integrated Dual Disorders Treatment, Dialectical Behavior Therapy, Matrix Model, Motivational Incentives Approach, as well as MAT (SAMHSA, Evidenced Based Practices 2008). Most professionals agree that the effective dissemination of these practices is essential for efforts to improve outcomes. With the exception of MI however, little attention is paid to the fundamentals of doing counseling or to those factors known to enhance positive change, such as forming and maintaining the therapeutic relationship or the instillation of hope. MI (MI; Miller & Rollnick, 2002) has been widely recognized as an effective counseling technique within addiction treatment settings and has received significant empirical support in over sixty clinical trials.

Regardless of the quality of the training and supervision or the fidelity to the model, the quality and effectiveness of the treatment model will be seriously eroded unless the counselor has quality skills in “the basics” of doing counseling. Research indicates that the therapeutic relationship accounts for 30% of patient outcomes. Further, 15% is attributed to the expectancy, also known as placebo effects. Only 15% is attributed to the specific counseling techniques used (The Heart & Soul of Change; Hubble, Duncan & Miller 1999). This research is consistent with Carl Rogers’ Person-Centered Approach and Abraham Maslow’s humanistic focus. Rogers noted that the important therapeutic factors for a growth-promoting therapeutic relationship include unconditional positive regard, genuineness, and accurate empathy (Rogers 1951). Both the contributions of Rogers and Maslow’s focus on the actualization of potential reflect the basic assumptions of a “recovery-oriented approach”. Unfortunately, many in the field either have not received quality training in the fundamental counseling skill of forming and maintaining the therapeutic relationship or have forgotten the basics during the course of their career. Given the importance of the therapeutic relationship in outcomes relative to specific counseling techniques, this core therapeutic skill should be of primary concern within the scope of any clinical development initiative or anyone interested in improving patient outcomes and increasing retention. It could be argued based on the empirical evidence, that this specific skill should itself be studied and developed as an EBP. It is clear from the plethora of available research on MAT that longer treatment duration and increased retention correlates with long term recovery. Counselors with a strong ability to form a positive therapeutic relationship with the patient would have a positive effect on patient retention.

## Proposal

The proposed workshop will focus on the opportunities and unique challenges involved in enhancing the therapeutic alliance with medication-assisted patients within the clinic setting. The presenter will first address the rationale for making this EBP a priority in training and supervision. The presenter will review the fundamentals of forming and maintaining a therapeutic relationship and the factors that affect the quality of the therapeutic relationship utilizing a power point presentation and interactive exercises. The constructive use of patient feedback during the course of counseling to strengthen the therapeutic alliance will be discussed. Boundary issues specific to the counselor in recovery will also be explored. The presenter will provide the clinician with a roadmap for the successful integration of the skills with their current clinical approach and existing clinical culture where they work. The presenter will also address counselor and patient “expectancy” as a therapeutic factor. The development of positive expectancy is a unique challenge in medication-assisted treatment. Despite wide professional recognition as the “Gold Standard” in treatment for opioid dependence, studies continue to demonstrate extremely high rates of negative or inaccurate beliefs regarding this form of treatment by both patients and counselors. The presenter will discuss recent experiences with enhancing the communication of positive expectancies for medication-assisted treatment. This workshop is designed for the “basic track” and was well-received when presented at previous AATOD Conferences as part of the basic track. The presentation will be 60 minutes in duration. A 30 minute discussion and question and answer period will follow.