Enhancing Spiritual Care in an Outpatient SUD Setting
Evaluation and Next Steps

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EXPANDED CHAPLAIN ROLE IN SUD CLINIC

- **STAFF SPIRITUAL CARE:**
  Created 4-week *Holiday Tea for the Spirit* program in Center for the Treatment of Addictive Disorders (CTAD)

- **VETERAN SPIRITUAL CARE:**
  Developed, led, and evaluated first-spirituality group in the intensive outpatient clinic (IOP)
SPIRITUAL CARE FOR STAFF

Holiday Tea for the Spirit

Join Chaplain Stephanie in the Break Room (IM162)
Fridays anytime from 2-3pm
November 29-December 20

Herbal tea & Holiday sweets
Art cards * Soft music
Essential oils * Time for checking in & re-grounding
HOLIDAY TEA FOR THE SPIRIT

- Conceived as a way of providing staff with extra emotional and spiritual support during stressful holiday season
- Held in main break room on 4 consecutive Friday afternoons between Thanksgiving and Christmas
- Attendance varied from 1-11 staff members, including clinic team leader, MD's, nurses, social workers, and front desk admins
- Seemed particularly beneficial in helping staff cope with loss and in reminding them of need for care for caretakers
Spirituality and self-compassion are seeds inside all Veterans with SUD that need to be tended and cared for.

A key role of the chaplain is to help Veterans become aware of the potent seeds of their spirituality and to teach them some basic tools or practices for nurturing them.

To increase the spiritual support of Veterans in outpatient SUD treatment, a spirituality and self-compassion group was developed, piloted, and evaluated.

“I have great faith in a seed. Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders.”

– Henry David Thoreau
HOW SELF-COMPASSION RELATES TO RECOVERY

- Spirituality and self-compassion practices may address these challenges faced by Veterans with SUD:¹
  - Stigma of addiction and mental health diagnoses
  - Shame, disconnection, and abandonment
  - Negative self-images and destructive behaviors
- BENEFITS: practicing self-compassion has been shown to increase emotional well-being, improve coping with life’s challenges, build resilience, and lower levels of anxiety and depression²
CURRICULUM OUTLINE

- 12 weeks in length and adapted from different evidence-based, compassion-focused mindfulness protocols, including Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC)\(^3\), Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)\(^4\), and Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT)\(^5\)
  - Intro to Self-Compassion (Weeks 1-4)
  - Relating to Difficult Emotions (Weeks 5-8)
  - Integration into Everyday Life (Weeks 9-12)
FOUNDATIONAL COMPONENTS

Curriculum incorporates four components:

- Readings from a diverse range of sacred texts
  - Ranges from quotations from Mr. Rogers and Carl Jung to Hindu myth and stories from the Judeo-Christian tradition
- Reflection questions
  - Assist the Veterans in identifying their spiritual resources and in relating those resources to the practice of self-compassion
- Spiritual practices
- Sharing THEIR sacred story
TIMELINE

- November 2018 – September 2019 (10 months long)
- October 2019: changes in outpatient group programming (reduction from 15 to 10 groups; retained M-F drop-in Motivation group, but only 5 additional groups that were closed and by referral only)
- Shortly after the outpatient group ended, began offering 2-session, bi-weekly inpatient version of group, allowing for greater patient care for those in residential treatment
- February 2020: as a response to Veteran demand, group was reinstated (for 3 weeks)
- Late March 2020: group halted along with all but one outpatient group (ACT for SUD) due to COVID-19 precautions
Total number of groups led: **42**

# Unique Veterans served: **199**

Average # of attendees: **14** (range 8-24)

Percentage of Vets who attended two or more sessions: **32%**

# of Veterans who attended > 4 sessions: **21**

Interestingly, the liveliest sessions overall were typically on the topic of shame and worthiness, in which I quoted Mr. Rogers on the need we all have for love.
Survey Questions and Results (N=14)

1. Spirituality is important for my recovery. (Likert)
   
   93% of respondents replied that they “strongly agreed” that spirituality was important for their recovery.

   **GOAL:** Identify and make use of spiritual resources or strengths:

2. Overall, this group has been effective in helping me identify and use my spiritual resources or strengths. (Likert)
   
   86% of respondents “strongly agreed” that the group was helpful in that regard.

   **GOAL:** Better understand the importance of self-compassion within recovery:

3. Overall, this group has helped me better understand the importance of self-compassion within recovery. (Likert)
   
   57% of respondents “strongly agreed” and 36% “agreed” that the group helped them in that regard.
Survey Questions and Results (N=14)

GOAL: Practice spiritual practices regularly:

4. I am practicing some of the self-compassion exercises I’ve learned in this group. (Likert)
   
   43% of respondents “strongly agreed” and 36% “agreed” that they were practicing the exercises learned.

5. If you answered “yes” to Question 4, which of the following practices have you found most effective?: (Soothing Touch Exercise; Loving Kindness Meditation; Self-Appreciation Exercise; Gratitude Practice; What Do I Need Meditation)
   
   64% of respondents stated that Loving Kindness Meditation was the practice they used most frequently outside of class.

6. If you answered Question 5, how often do you practice self-compassion?
   (Daily; About every other day; Weekly; Once in a while; Never)
   
   80% of those who answered the question stated “daily.”

GOAL: Satisfaction:

7. 71% stated that they “strongly agree” they would recommend the group to other Veterans. (Likert)
Per Session Participant Feedback (n=46)

- Participants provided feedback on individual sessions:
  1. Overall, what I liked about this class was [fill in the blank]
  2. Overall, what I disliked about this class was [fill in the blank]

- Common themes:
  - appreciated full group participation in readings and practices
  - enjoyed the included poems, quotes, and stories
  - positive feedback on class themes
  - only negative feedback received had to do with behavior of other group attendees
PROJECT DISSEMINATION

- Presented poster at the VAPHS Advanced Fellows poster session in May 2019
- Wrote up abstract and distributed it to outside mentors and other VA research colleagues for feedback
- Presented poster in April at 2020 Caring for the Human Spirit (virtual) Conference sponsored by the Spiritual Care Association
- Creating resource guide for VA chaplains to facilitate the provision of spirituality and self-compassion support in SUD settings
- Drafting manuscript for submission to a peer-reviewed SUD journal
“I got to know and understand myself more [through this class].”—Veteran participant
2. See MacBeth & Gumley, 2012; Neff, Long, et al., 2018; Zessin et al., 2015; Stutts et al., 2018.
Thank you!

QUESTIONS?