



# THE WTC RESPONDER HEALTH WATCH

NYU/Bellevue

Occupational & Environmental Medicine Clinic

## Dear 9/11 Responders

The staff at NYU/Bellevue Occupational & Environmental Medicine Clinic would like to thank all the participants for your support of the WTC Medical Monitoring & Treatment Program. Your feedback is greatly appreciated.

We are adding two members to our mental health staff, Dr. Mark Evces and Dr. Suzanne Colin. You will be reading more about them in upcoming newsletters from the NYU/Bellevue clinical center. In this issue, our mental health professionals would like to share with you their experiences with the program and our responders. Please join the NYU/Bellevue staff in expressing our sincere thanks to our dedicated professionals.

## From our Mental Health Professionals

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### WHEN IT'S MORE THAN "JUST-MY-JOB."

For most responders, work is often much more than just "a day at the office." Critical incidents like the attacks of 9/11/01 can be stressful, difficult, or even overwhelming. For some, these reactions can continue for some time after the event, and may even lead to interpersonal, occupational, and emotional difficulties. For these persistent reactions, psychotherapy has been shown in numerous studies to be an effective treatment. However, we've found that many program members are

reluctant to engage in treatment because of misunderstandings or stereotypes regarding what psychotherapy is, and what it is not. In this column, we hope to dispel some of these myths. On the next page, two 9/11 responders who have "been there" talk about their experience with therapy.

### PSYCHOTHERAPY IS NOT:

First, individual psychotherapy is not primarily a lengthy journey of self-discovery. Nor is it an esoteric practice that promotes an overly self-involved escape from 'real life.' People who attend psychotherapy are not "weaker" or "worse off" than people who don't. Like people who see a physician to stay healthy, people who go to see a therapist are taking the initiative to live the kind of life they want to lead.

### PSYCHOTHERAPY IS:

Instead, individual psychotherapy is a treatment whose aim is to provide maximum relief from emotional distress as quickly as possible. In our program, after a thorough assessment, the client and therapist meet together once a week for 45-50 minutes in a private room. Their conversations usually consist of some teaching (called, "psychoeducation") about mental health problems and coping skills, followed by more structured discussions of thoughts and feelings related to the stressful experience that brought the responder in for treatment. The specific aims of psychotherapy include working to examine and resolve strong negative feelings, and helping to better deal with difficult memories, thoughts and feelings in a safe, controlled, environment.

In hopes of further de-mystifying this treatment, two responders who are also former clients agreed to share their experiences 'in treatment':

## RETIRED LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER

*Responder:* The first couple sessions were very difficult. As a law enforcement officer, we really don't talk about 'issues' and keep everything locked up among ourselves. We don't want to bring these things home to our family or let them out to others.

*Therapist:* What changed?

*Responder:* The way you communicated with me helped. I felt very comfortable. The biggest thing was that you took it easy with me. As I got more comfortable it became easier to talk.

*Therapist:* I remember thinking, "it takes a lot of strength to begin to talk about these things." What would you say to other program members who are considering psychotherapy?

*Responder:* There's an old saying with the hostage negotiation team: their logo is "talk to me." I would add that...but talk to others that can help. Don't keep it locked in. It's a big mistake.

## PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEE

*Responder:* My first couple of visits, I didn't know what to expect. It was scary at first. I wasn't sure if it would work. I had my doubts.

*Therapist:* What would you tell other members who are considering psychotherapy?

*Responder:* I would tell anyone who is considering therapy that it is normal to be afraid, but it can really help you gain more control over your life.

If you are having some reservations about giving therapy a try, you're not alone. As you can see from the responders quoted above, many people feel that way when they begin. The first responders who come to psychotherapy will tell you that not only does it eventually get easier, but symptoms resolve, relationships improve, and work becomes more meaningful.

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Did you change your address or telephone number or have a comment for us?

Is it time for your next visit, but you have not heard from us?

Please feel free to contact us at 212-562-4572 for details on appointment hours and further answers to your questions.