

Personal/Professional Dilemmas

Category: Uncertainty

written by Vicki Handfield | August 12, 2020

Telehealth mental health or in-person mental health? That is the question. There are mixed opinions among my colleagues, just as with other areas of specialization. As a psychologist in private practice, I'm on my own in this decision-making morass.

It certainly was ultra clear back in March that in-person was out of the question. My practice has suffered; I'm fortunate that the financial losses haven't been devastating.

My health is good, although being sixty-eight years old makes me part of the vulnerable group; and my partner is older and more vulnerable.

Back in May, I started to get more hopeful about having in-person sessions. I wrote my plans down, ordered plastic facial masks, debated requiring them. Knowing I could have open windows gave me hope.

Being in the Southwest, however, all those thoughts went out the open windows.

Therapy sessions are lengthy and intense. People cry, blow their noses, use tissues, get upset. I often tend to lean in, physically, showing concern and attention. We need to see each other's faces.

The epidemic appears to be slowing a bit, in the sense of numbers being counted. Who knows how accurate these numbers may be? Who knows how many asymptomatic folks are out there? I can't gather enough information before seeing a new client. For instance, one client told me after a couple of sessions that she had been diagnosed with pleurisy, and now her children were having play dates with a neighbor . . .

Fall and winter are not far off. When it turns cold, windows will be closed, heat will be circulating, and we won't be breathing clean, outside air. So, it's not realistic to start having in-person sessions. It's not safe.

I enjoy my work, I appreciate my clients. They are an important source of human contact for me, not the only source to be sure, but different from most friends and family. I miss seeing more clients, doing more work, feeling I have something to offer. I offered to do pro bono work with a local hospital, to see their ICU staff. No response. I'm sure they are overwhelmed, and I'm no stranger to resistance from bureaucracies to volunteering. I feel badly for medical staff, that I can't do more for them. I do see medical professionals as clients and feel very strongly about helping and supporting them.

My work supports me. This is a lonely and difficult time.

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