

Getting the Right Treatment for an Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

By: Fred Penzel, Ph.D.

Whenever you get the name of a behavioral therapist or psychiatrist, whatever the source, be sure to check out the practitioner's credentials and level of knowledge and experience. Don't be afraid to conduct a mini-interview with them when you call. You have the right to assertively question their ability to help you. Be sure to ask the following types of questions when you call the practitioner:

1. "What degrees do you hold and are you state licensed?" (Avoid the unlicensed as they are unregulated, uninsured, and you will have no protection if you feel you have not been treated properly.)
2. "Do you specialize in OCD (or Body Dysmorphic Disorder, Trichotillomania, Compulsive Skin Picking, or Compulsive Nail Biting as the case may be)? What are your qualifications, and have you had any special supervised training in the treatment of my disorder?"
3. "How long have you been in practice? How many cases of my disorder have you treated? How many cases of this are you currently treating?"
4. "What is your orientation?" (Ask this question only if you are calling about getting therapy, not medication. The correct answer should be behavioral or cognitive/behavioral.)
5. "Do you endorse the use of behavioral therapy together with medication?" (Ask this if you are calling a psychiatrist. The correct answer should be "Yes.")
6. "Do you endorse the use of medication (if necessary) together with behavioral therapy? (Ask this if you are calling a behavioral therapist. The correct answer should be "Yes.")
7. What techniques do you use to treat disorders such as mine? (Ask this if you are calling about cognitive/behavioral therapy, and make sure the answer is Exposure and Response Prevention for OCD and BDD, and Habit Reversal Training plus Stimulus Control for TTM, skin picking and nail biting. A therapist who uses these techniques is probably trained in cognitive therapy as well, but ask if they have training in this approach anyway.)
8. What is your fee? Are your services covered by insurance (if this is an important factor in affording therapy)? Note: Check your own insurance coverage before you call to make sure you are covered for outpatient mental health services. Also find out about how much coverage you have.
9. How often would you have to see me? (Once per week is about average, unless you are looking into intensive short-term therapy).
10. On the average, how long does the treatment take? (This may be a difficult question to answer if there are other problems to be solved in addition to an OC disorder)

If you are not happy about the answers you are getting, or if the person you are talking to is being evasive, don't hesitate to go elsewhere. Keep trying until you find someone you feel comfortable with. In any case, be persistent and don't give up.

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