Integrating Telemental Health Practice Into Counselor Education Training

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Preface

My motivation to explore teaching telemental health came from an interaction with a student in 2015 while teaching a clinical mental health counseling internship class. The student was discussing her client's case and, at one point, remarked, "It's just hard because I see her on the VeeSee." My response to the student was, "What's the VeeSee?" panicking internally when the student explained that she was seeing her client via video conferencing software. I asked the student where she learned to counsel clients via videoconferencing and who was supervising her on that technology—because I knew it was not us.

Our program did not train students in what would come to be known as telemental health (TMH) in 2015, but this brief interaction alerted me that we should be. I took it upon myself to get trained. Having completed my master's degree in 1996 and my doctorate in 2010, I never received TMH training. Even though I remained in clinical practice, the agencies I worked with did not use TMH before COVID-19. I completed the distance credentialed counselor (DCC) training through Renewed Vision Counseling and became my institution's de facto TMH researcher and instructor. I later transitioned this credential to the Board Certified Telemental Health Provider (BC-TMH). I obtained grants in 2016 and 2018 focused on teaching TMH and my first book contract on the practice of TMH in 2019. Then, unexpectedly, in March of 2020, my prior training and research became of great importance as our students swiftly transitioned to digital delivery.

Digital delivery of counseling services, known as *telemental health*, is not new. Practices date back to the 1950s when psychiatrists conducted clinical interviews via closed-circuit television. Around 2000, technologies expanded through broadband internet and smartphones, opening digital counseling to a broader audience. Over the past 20+

years, a growing research base has verified its efficacy with multiple populations and clinical foci. In 2020, COVID-19 propelled the profession into widespread use of TMH, yet the training that prepared counselors for that transition is questionable. Some counselors may have transitioned to TMH with no training at all. Training in TMH, even before COVID-19, was problematic. No unified training standards exist for digital counseling delivery. Although there are national certification programs, these programs vary in terms of training content, cost, and length of time.

The training dilemma extends into counselor education programs. During COVID-19, the Council on the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP) and state organizations approved the digital delivery of counseling services for fieldwork experiences. The newest 2024 CACREP standards do not specifically require counselor education programs to train students on TMH but do require training programs to address the "application of technology related to counseling" (CACREP, 2023, Standard 3.E.5) and for "establishing and maintaining counseling relationships across service delivery modalities" (Standard 3.E.7). Despite these directives, faculty may have limited knowledge or experience in the nuances of TMH delivery. There is a significant knowledge gap between those who were trained prior and those who will be trained in the future. Counselor educators training the next generation of counselors in digital delivery may lack knowledge and experience in TMH.

Even counselor educators trained in TMH practice can lack the tools to translate that knowledge into their training. Counseling curricula are already full of required information, and counselor educators and instructors may be unsure how to weave TMH content into their existing programs. Despite the growth, emergence, and increase of digital services, there are no resources on how an educator can provide training on TMH counseling. Various books have been written for practitioners on delivering TMH. Yet, to date, none exists for the educator or instructor charged with teaching TMH practice to counselors-in-training (CITs). This book addresses that shortcoming by providing a resource that counselor educators and instructors can use to train current and future counselors in TMH.

It should be noted that this book assumes that instructors hold a foundational knowledge of TMH practices. The book aims to support instructors in integrating TMH knowledge into their counselor education training programs. Instructors who lack foundational knowledge in TMH are encouraged to receive TMH training, review resources on

TMH, or engage in supervised TMH counseling prior to training counselors in TMH practice. Some suggested resources are provided in Chapter 1. The book is divided into four sections to support the integration of TMH concepts into counselor education.

Section 1 includes two chapters that set the stage for using the book within your curriculum. Chapter 1 provides general concepts on TMH and common definitions while also directing readers to additional resources for gaining TMH content knowledge. Instructors lacking knowledge or experience in TMH can start with the resources at the end of the chapter to develop that foundation. Chapter 2 discusses teaching TMH through a CACREP lens and multiple modalities such as on-campus, online synchronous, and online asynchronous. This chapter concludes with an introduction to *andragogy,* the practice of adult education, which informs the instructional delivery methods suggested.

Section 2 addresses the foundational CACREP curriculum, including Professional Orientation, Social and Cultural Diversity, Lifespan Development, Career Development, Counseling Practice and Relationships, Group Counseling and Group Work, Assessment and Diagnostic Processes, and Research and Program Evaluation. Section 3 addresses CACREP specialization areas, including Addictions, Career, Clinical Mental Health, Clinical Rehabilitation, College and Student Affairs, Marriage/Couple/Family, and School Counseling. In Sections 2 and 3, the format of the chapters includes Key Concepts, Teaching Techniques, and Sample Lessons.

Key concepts address CACREP standards, and two to three additional focus areas are worthy of attention. All CACREP standards within the curricular area are reviewed, and specific suggestions for integrating TMH concepts are included in alignment with each standard. The additional focus areas provide instructors with information or reminders on TMH topics that warrant special attention or emphasis within the counseling curriculum. Teaching Techniques within each chapter outline 10 suggested activities that instructors can utilize to actively integrate TMH into their counseling curriculum. Each chapter in Sections 2 and 3 contains two Sample Lessons on teaching TMH within the foundational or specialization areas. Several professionals across multiple organizations and institutions have contributed, coauthored, edited, and supplemented these lessons to provide the reader with diverse ideas, styles, and mechanisms to teach TMH. The lessons include interactive classroom activities, case studies, and lecture topics that instructors can modify to suit their instruction and student needs.

Section 4 includes additional considerations for integrating TMH content into the counseling curriculum. Chapter 18 addresses Professional Practice and Fieldwork, and Chapter 19 addresses Counselor Education and Supervision. These chapters also address CACREP curricular standards and teaching techniques but do not include sample lessons. Finally, Chapter 20 addresses future trends in TMH counseling and training.

Counselors are no longer just sitting across from their clients and students in physical spaces but meeting their clients and students where they are through digital delivery. Teaching TMH practice to the next generation of counselors can be daunting, particularly for those not trained and experienced in its use or those unsure how to integrate their TMH knowledge into the classroom. Technology is constantly changing, improving, and innovating. As educators and instructors, we commit ourselves to remaining current in the emerging practices of the field. This book intends to support instructors by linking key elements of TMH and CACREP standards directly to the curricular areas in which they teach. I hope to make the prospect of teaching TMH less intimidating and, by doing so, help you avoid the internal panic I experienced back in 2015.

Be well, practice wisely, and thank you for being open to teaching TMH counseling ethically and effectively. Future counselors are counting on our ability to do so.

References

Council on the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs. (2023). *2024*

CACREP standards. https://www.cacrep.org/for-programs/