

Dialogus

"A Free E-mail Newsletter – Furthering the Dialogue to Better Serve Survivors of Torture"

Volume 1, Number 1, August 2000

Dialogus provides a forum for members of the torture treatment centers in the U.S. who serve survivors of torture to participate in a dialogue about innovative approaches in their work with survivors as well as share resource information, news, and solutions to challenges we face. We hope that you will enjoy being part of this forum and community. However, if you wish to unsubscribe to Dialogus in the body of the text, just type: Unsubscribe (your e-mail address).

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Editorial

The Collaborative Spirit Behind Dialogus

Dear Esteemed Colleague:

Each year, members of the torture treatment centers in the U.S. meet under the generous hospitality of the CVT of Minnesota. We leave the meeting with renewed energy, expanded knowledge, a stronger sense of solidarity and a sort of nostalgia for having to leave behind the wonderful moments spent together. We all value

those meetings and the importance of sharing experiences in this sensitive field of serving vulnerable and traumatized persons. We feel that sharing our thoughts and talking about our daily work and our troubles makes us richer in knowledge and wisdom and gives us a fresh vitality and enthusiasm to go back to our individual efforts.

To keep up with the spirit created at the annual meetings in Minnesota, and to foster the sense of community built after a few days of being together, the Program for Torture Victims (PTV) of Los Angeles has taken the initiative to start an on-going dialogue amongst interested staff of Torture Treatment Centers in the U.S. Our intention is to encourage people to keep in touch and to continue the dialogue started at our annual meetings. We also would like to encourage people to write about their experiences, their observations, and their quandaries while working with survivors. We hope that this e-newsletter will grow and develop into a journal reflecting the particularities of our work with survivors of torture in the U.S.

We would also like to make this a collaborative project for our community -- the community formed by torture treatment centers in the U.S. Consequently, we welcome your suggestions, your communications, and your submission of articles. We have temporarily named this e-newsletter Dialogus, which is the Latin word for "dialogue". Why did we choose Latin? Because the roots of many words in many languages (not only Romance languages) come from Latin. Similarly, we want this project be the root for a growing source of creativity and enthusiasm that would be reflected in an improvement of our services to survivors. We invite you to submit your nominations for a permanent title for this e-newsletter. We invite you to continue in the collaborative spirit that has developed, to share and grow in our work to empower and provide the best care possible to survivors of torture in the years to come.

Announcement

Submit Your Nominations for a Title for This E-Newsletter

We invite you to submit your nominations for a title for this e-newsletter by e-mailing your suggestions to: PTVNewsletter@usa.com. Until an official title is chosen, Dialogus will be the temporary title of this publication.

Article

The Healing Club: A Unique Approach to Help Survivors of Torture

by Ana Deutsch, MFCC

* This article originally appeared in E-Research Newsletter, Volume 8, Number 2, March 2000 (ISSN 1527-2591), Special Issue (Part 2 of 2 editions): Torture Survivors*

Numerous methods of psychological treatment, including individual therapies, group and other integrative therapies, as well as medically oriented therapies, have been reported to be successful with survivors of torture. However, these are anecdotal reports and empirical studies demonstrating effective outcomes with any particular technique are lacking.

There is a consensus among professionals that psychotherapy with victims of severe trauma is a difficult process. Survivors of torture do not identify themselves as patients having a mental disorder. They usually struggle to forget the trauma and rarely seek treatment. When they cannot suppress their memory of their past trauma, posttraumatic symptoms may surface or intensify. At this point, they may consider seeking help. Often when clinicians first see them they are in crisis.

The goal of therapy with survivors of torture has been conceptualized as “restoring the well-being of the individual,” “restoring them to their previous level of functioning,” “restoring their shattered identity,” or “reintegrating the traumatic experience into the personality.” Many different psychotherapeutic approaches can address and achieve those goals, and the selection of a particular psychotherapy method depends on the professional’s training and/or preference. But, the question “what is the healing factor?” still has to be addressed.

Our experience tells us that the most important factor to produce a healing effect is the quality of the relationship between survivor and therapist. This observation is supported by research that shows that the relationship between patient and therapist may have a shamanistic effect in which the therapist is the facilitator for the patient to find the cure for himself/herself.

This premise is particularly true for survivors of torture that emigrated to the United States. Their traumatic experiences in their home countries are compounded by current acculturative stressors, which involve adjusting to a new

life, finding a niche in a new society, and re-building one's life. Trauma plus the survivor's current situation weakens their ability to solve problems or to be functional in the world.

We find that most of the survivors seen at the Program for Torture Victims are individuals with strong personalities. They were often tortured in their homelands due to their commitment to their political, social, religious, and/or cultural ideals. They are smart individuals with good hearts, in many cases having led fascinating lives. They are fighters for social justice. The question becomes: how can we help them to restore their integrity and efficacy? We believe that the answer rests in the survivors themselves. We believe it is essential to provide our clients with an appropriate, emotionally warm, and friendly environment. Healing is fostered by creating a safe framework for survivors to reconnect with the personality they had before their torture and persecution.

Keeping these principles in mind, we created the "Healing Club," a vital component of our larger program that provides an array of medical and psychological services. Clients, therapists and volunteers form this club. The club meets once a month and spends a whole Saturday afternoon doing different activities such as hiking, walking on the beach, or visiting a museum. It provides healing activities for everybody who participates. As a number of the survivors had to leave family members behind, the Healing Club also provides an opportunity for survivors to develop support networks. It is a social club with no formal structure other than the time, date and place to meet. Participants want to know each other, and what is most important, want to share past positive experiences. Going to the beach for instance, may elicit memories of going to the beach in their own countries, and prompt them to want to tell a particular anecdote or episode that is fond in the memory of the person telling the story. Conversations are spontaneous, and therapists and volunteers are requested not to initiate discussions about traumatic experiences. Sometimes, however, the survivor spontaneously shares parts of their trauma stories in this context.

By participating in the Healing Club, the person will get in touch with the "good internal objects," which are a part of the foundation of his or her personality. This process brings about lasting positive effects, restoring self-confidence and self-esteem. The individual is provided with an opportunity to rediscover his or her own strength which may be used at a later time when facing difficulties. The Healing Club provides a forum for survivors to start their journey of healing.

** Ana Deutsch, MFCC, is co-founder and Clinical Director of the Program for Torture Victims in Los Angeles, California. Persons interested in knowing more about The Healing Club can reach Ana Deutsch by e-mail at: anadeutsch@earthlink.net **

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES AND THOUGHTS WITH YOUR COLLEAGUES!

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

How to Contribute to Dialogus

Dialogus encourages submissions from those who work with survivors of torture. We welcome your contributions of:

Issues related to treating survivors of torture: articles on various innovative clinical interventions and programs, how you handled challenging cases or situations, policies, and other information relevant to work with survivors.

History of your program

Descriptions of research or assessment instruments that are currently being used with torture survivors, or are being developed and tested

Descriptions of research studies and projects

Book and article reviews

Resource information on: conferences; training opportunities; call for papers; grants; new books, manuscripts, or monographs; interventions and programs; where to order useful clinical supplies or training materials; and other resources

Informative Internet sites and resources

News

Submission Guidelines:

1. All article submissions should be between 500 to 900 words, not including references. Shorter submissions are also encouraged.
2. Author(s) of article submissions should include a 50-word or shorter biographical sketch of author(s), and include an e-mail address where the readers can contact the author(s).
3. The editors of Dialogus would prefer if you would send the attachment of your article or other submissions in Microsoft Word 7.0 or in Rich Text Format.
4. Submissions should be sent to the editors of Dialogus at:
PTVNewsletter@usa.com.

We anticipate publishing this e-newsletter on a bimonthly basis. If you are interested in submitting something, please e-mail PTVNewsletter@usa.com for more information and submission guidelines.

RESOURCES

Calendar of Events:

September 20-23, 2000

“Who Owns the Body – An International Conference”

Partial listing of Panel Topics: “Witnesses From the Grave: Mass Graves and Communities of Loss,” “Broken Bones: State-Sponsored Torture and Terror,” “Saying Goodbye: Grieving Communities,” “Traffic in Bodies and Body Parts,” and “The Repatriation of the Remains of Che Guevara.”

Judith L. Herman, M.D. will be the Keynote Speaker on Wednesday evening.

The International House at University of California, Berkeley; Berkeley, CA

Conference Program

Administrator Laurie Goldman at:

(tel) 510-642-6671, (fax)

510-643-5620, or e-mail

lauriesg@uclink4.berkeley.edu

November

8-10, 2000

2nd Congress of Social Psychology of
Human Rights – “Stamp Out Torture Now”

(Deadline for submitting papers is October 30, 2000)

Mexico City, Mexico

Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez

Human Rights Center (PRODH),

Serapio Rendón 57-B, Colonia San

Rafael, Delegación Cuahtémoc, CP

06470, México, D.F., Fax: (5) 535

68 92; Tels: (5) 546 82 17; (5) 566

78 54. E-mail to:

visitas@sjsocial.org or visit:

<http://www.sjsocial.org/PRODH>

November 16-19, 200

“International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies’ (ISTSS) 16th Annual Meeting – Public Health Perspectives on Trauma Research and Treatment: A Continuum of Care from Primary Prevention to Clinical Services”

San Antonio, Texas at the Hyatt San Antonio on the Riverwalk

ISTSS, 60 Revere Dr., Suite 500,

Northbrook, IL 60062 USA, Tel

(847) 480-9028, Fax (847)

480-9282, e-mail: conf@istss.org,

Web-site: <http://www.istss.org/>

News:

Amnesty International will launch “Stamp out Torture,” its International Campaign Against Torture, on October 18, 2000. For more information on the campaign, contact:

<http://www.amnesty.org/campaign/index.html#stamp> or <http://www.stoptorture.org/>. To contact the Amnesty International office in New York, call 212-807-8400 or e-mail: admin-us@aiusa.org.

The Grupo de Accion Comunitaria and the University Institute Rafael Burgaleta (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) have organized the “I Diploma on Mental Health in Political Violence and Catastrophe.” It is an on-line 300-hour Diploma to be held in Spanish from January to November 2001. For further information, please contact: <http://www.eurosur.org/~gac/presenta/index.html> or gac.org@arrakis.es

E-Mail Lists Providing Information Related to Torture and Human Rights:

Torture Rehabilitation List: A periodic e-mail list of news, information, and resources for providers working with torture survivors and survivors themselves. Subscribe by e-mailing mlarson@igc.org.

Amnesty International News for Health Professionals: Amnesty International has an e-mail newsletter for health professionals concerned with human rights issues. To subscribe, e-mail: medical@amnesty.org. These Amnesty International bulletins with human rights information and web links for health professions are now also available on Amnesty International's Health Professional Network web-site at: <http://www.amnestyusa.org/group/hpn/newsletter/>

The Humanitarian Times is a free e-mail news publication covering news and trends in global crises and humanitarian aid. To subscribe email to: HTimes@email.msn.com.

Web Sites of Torture Treatment Centers in the U.S.

Below is a partial list of Web site addresses of some of the torture treatment centers in the U.S. We do not have the Web site addresses for all of the centers in the U.S. Please let us know if we are missing some Web sites or if we do not have the correct addresses, so that we can circulate an updated list.

Amigos de los Sobrevivientes (Eugene, OR): www.pacinfo.com/eugene/tsnet

Center for Victims of Torture (Minneapolis, MN): www.cvt.org

Human Rights Clinic – Doctors of the World (New York, NY):
www.doctorsoftheworld.org

Program for Torture Victims (Los Angeles, CA):
www.ProgramForTortureVictims.org

Rocky Mountain Survivors Center (Denver, CO): www.home.earthlink.net/~rmsc

Survivors International (San Francisco, CA): www.survivorsintl.org

This e-newsletter is sponsored by the Program for Torture Victims (PTV), which has been providing medical and psychological services to torture survivors in the Greater Los Angeles area since 1980.

* Dialogus encourages you to forward this e-newsletter and share any information with colleagues. However, the authors who contribute to Dialogus would appreciate your using proper citations and/or contacting them for permission to use the information in any articles or manuscripts *

** The statements and information presented in Dialogus are not necessarily those of Dialogus or the Program for Torture Victims. Dialogus and the Program for Torture Victims assume no responsibility for statements made or expressed and do not endorse any particular service or training listed in this e-newsletter. Rather, resources are provided for your information only. **