Unit XIII: Treatment of Abnormal Behavior

Module 71
Behavior, Cognitive, and Group Therapies
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Module Learning Objectives

71-1 Explain how the basic assumption of behavior therapy differs from those of psychodynamic and humanistic therapies, and describe the techniques used in exposure therapies and aversive conditioning.

71-2 State the main premise of therapy based on operant conditioning principles, and describe the views of its proponents and critics.

71-3 Discuss the goals and techniques of cognitive therapy and of cognitive-behavioral therapy.

71-4 Discuss the aims and benefits of group and family therapy.
Behavior Therapies
Behavior Therapy

- Therapy that applies learning principles to the elimination of unwanted behaviors.
- Effective in treating phobias or sexual disorders.
- Behavior therapists do not delve deeply below the surface looking for inner causes, but seek to replace unwanted learned behaviors with more constructive ones.
Classical Conditioning Techniques

• **Counterconditioning** is a procedure that conditions new responses to stimuli that trigger unwanted behaviors.
• It is based on classical conditioning and includes exposure therapy and aversive conditioning.
Exposure Therapy

• Expose patients to things they fear and avoid. Through repeated exposures, anxiety lessens because they habituate to the things feared.

Can involve exposing people to fear-driving objects in real or virtual environments.
Systematic Desensitization

A type of exposure therapy that associates a pleasant, relaxed state with gradually increasing anxiety-triggering stimuli. Commonly used to treat phobias.
Aversive Conditioning

• A type of counterconditioning that associates an unpleasant state with an unwanted behavior.
• With this technique, temporary conditioned aversion to alcohol has been reported.
Operant Conditioning
Operant Conditioning

- Operant conditioning procedures enable therapists to use behavior modification.
- Desired behaviors are rewarded and undesired behaviors are either unrewarded or punished.
Token Economy

• In institutional settings, therapists may create a token economy in which patients exchange a token of some sort—earned for exhibiting the desired behavior—for various privileges or treats.
Cognitive Therapies
Cognitive Therapy

Teaches people adaptive ways of thinking and acting based on the assumption that our thinking colors our feelings and emotional reactions.

- **Lost job**
  - Internal beliefs: I’m worthless. It’s hopeless.
  - Depression

- **Lost job**
  - Internal beliefs: My boss is a jerk. I deserve something better.
  - No depression
Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy

- A confrontational cognitive therapy
- Developed by Albert Ellis
- Vigorously challenges the “absurdity” of people’s illogical, self-defeating attitudes and assumptions
Beck’s Therapy for Depression

- Aaron Beck suggests that depressed patients believe that they can never be happy and thus associate minor failings in life as major causes for their depression.
- Beck believes that clients must reverse catastrophizing beliefs.
- This change is brought about by gently questioning patients.
Cognitive therapists often combine the reversal of self-defeated thinking with efforts to modify behavior.

Cognitive-behavior therapy aims to alter the way people act (behavior therapy) and alter the way they think (cognitive therapy).

Useful for OCD, mood disorders, & anxiety disorders.
Group & Family Therapies
Group Therapy

• Group therapy normally consists of 6-9 people attending a 90-minute session that can help more people and costs less.

• Clients benefit from knowing others have similar problems.
Family Therapy

- Family therapy treats the family as a system.
- Therapy guides family members toward positive relationships and improved communication.
Self-Help Groups

• Most self-help and support groups focus on stigmatized or hard-to-discuss illnesses.
• Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is the “grandparent” of support groups.
• Also helpful for those with eating disorders, the bereaved, the divorced, or those simply seeking fellowship & emotional support.