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# Social Security Newsletter

This is a newsletter of interest to professionals who provide services to potential Social Security disability and SSI claimants. © 2023

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## Mental Health Therapy and Counseling - a “Win-Win” Decision!

**SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY** Insurance and SSI benefits are awarded to claimants who can document medical impairments which preclude the ability to perform any full-time work for a period that has lasted, or is expected to last, twelve months or result in death.

**THE QUESTIONS THEN ARE:** what symptoms are important to Social Security and how do we prove the severity of those symptoms on the ability to work?

**WITH “OBJECTIVE” SYMPTOMS** – those that can be measured by science – the analysis is clear. For example, lung function can be measured with a pulmonary function test.

**HOWEVER, “SUBJECTIVE” SYMPTOMS** are more challenging – measuring pain, fatigue, depression, and anxiety are not as clear.

**SEVERAL YEARS AGO, SSA** modified its Mental Health Listings in its Listings of Impairments to make proof of total disability more difficult. These 4 mental health questions were also expanded to the Listings for Multiple Sclerosis, seizure disorders, Lupus, chronic pain, and other medical problems not usually treated by mental health professionals.

### THE FOUR QUESTIONS ARE:

- How do these symptoms impact the ability to understand, remember or apply information;
- How do these symptoms impact interaction with other people;
- How do these symptoms impact the ability to concentrate, persist or maintain work pace;
- How do these symptoms impact the ability to adapt or manage oneself?

**THE PROBLEM IS THAT** the neurologist for MS is not documenting these four issues. Similarly, the Rheumatologist treating Lupus, and the Pain Management Physician are not focused on how their patient is interacting with other people.

**THIS IS WHERE MENTAL HEALTH** therapy and counseling can make a difference. First, counseling is almost always justifiable. Chronic illness and depression/ anxiety are often intertwined and certainly loss of work aggravate even minor depression symptoms. Second, the four activities noted in the Listings are often critical areas that claimants need to address for their quality of life and future.



**THERAPISTS DO OFTEN** address these issues. Weekly or bi-weekly sessions can help improve family interactions, feelings of self-worth and help cope with pain, fatigue, and other limitations. Secondly, those charts help document the severity of the symptoms and their impact on the claimant’s ability to function. This is a so-called “win-win” situation.

**THE KEY IS EDUCATION.** Many people are resistant to even the suggestion of a mental health issue, or the idea of getting mental health treatment. One critical role of an experienced Social Security representative is to educate the new client and family on the importance of counseling to both improve their future, and to help document the subjective symptoms, and their impact on function, for the Social Security application.

**LEARNING TO DISCUSS** and document these issues can be challenging. Contact us for a free in-service for your agency or community group and we can review these issues in more detail.