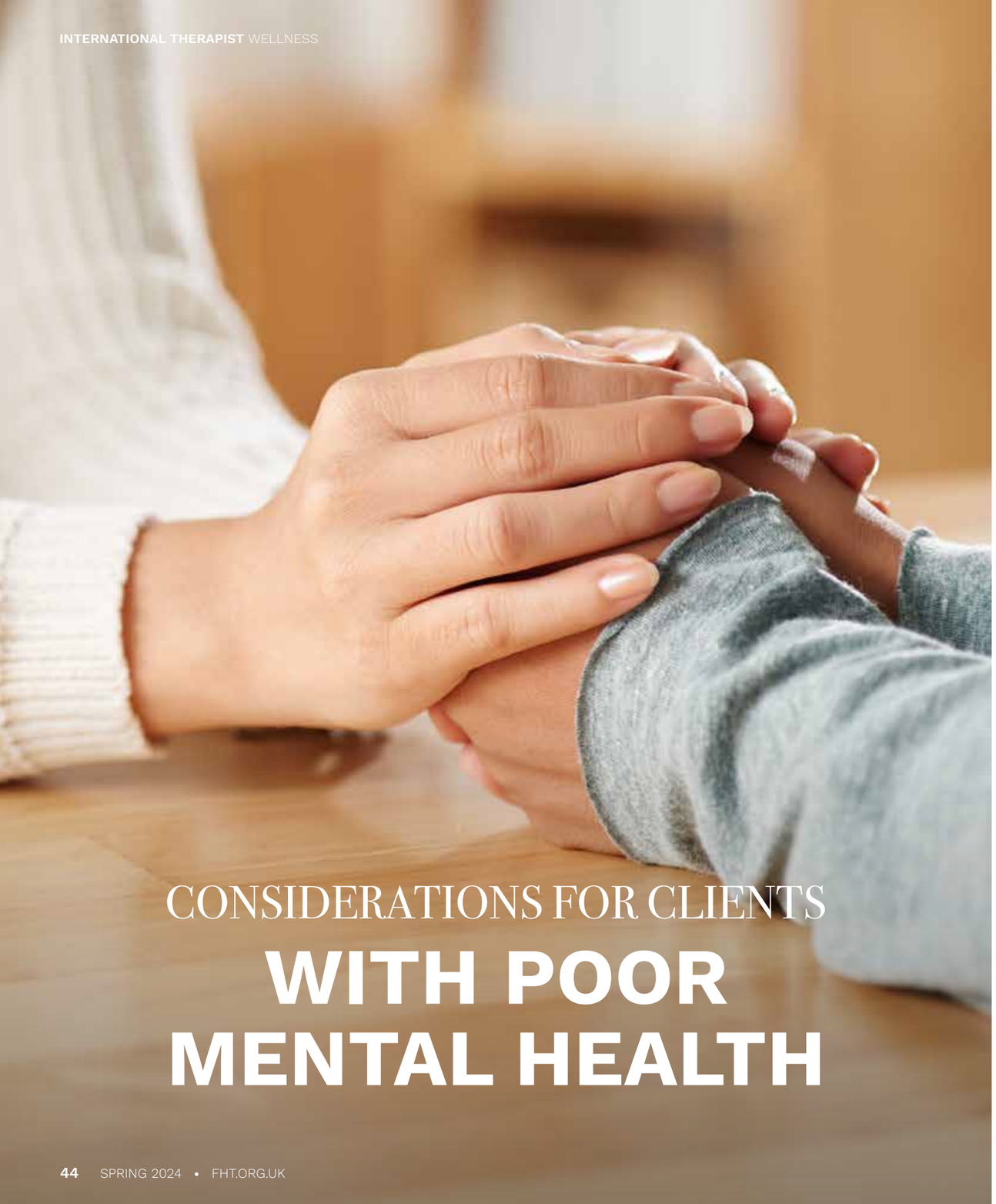


CONSIDERATIONS FOR CLIENTS WITH POOR MENTAL HEALTH

Katy Lassetter highlights the signs of poor mental health and how you can spot them to enhance your clients' experiences

WORDS KATY LASSETTER

Every year, mental health problems impact one in four of us in England[1]. Did you know that five of the 10 leading causes of disability worldwide are related to poor mental health[2]? Accessibility for clients with poor mental health is key if you want to run a successful practice.

TYPES OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the five mental health problems that cause disability are major depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorders, alcohol use and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). But mental health problems are far wider ranging, and lack of awareness can impact the treatment of clients who suffer in silence.

With advice on more than 30 conditions online, the mental health charity Mind considers mental health problems to encompass everything from anger, Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) and eating problems to hoarding, loneliness and paranoia, as well as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) and sleep problems.

"I find joining fitness classes and accessing a range of treatments help engage my body and spirituality. But that's not come without obstacles. The issue is that my conditions are invisible and lack awareness," says Sharon Michelle Brisley-Moore, author of *Over Catastrophising Daily*. "It's difficult to see a client's internal suffering. However, picking up on signals and knowing how to help them beyond your basic offer can make a difference."

HOW TO SPOT THE SIGNS

When speaking to Sharon Michelle Brisley-Moore about her experience living with OCD and high-functioning anxiety for over 30 years, I discovered that the following are typical indications that a client is suffering with poor mental health:

Verbal clues:

- Putting themself down
- Asking lots of questions and over clarifying
- Seeking reassurance and praise
- Over apologising
- Quick speech (when nervous)
- Slurred speech (when chronically fatigued)

Non-verbal clues:

- Shakes and hand tremors
- Sweating body and wet-looking hairline
- Pale or flushed appearance
- Slow heavy movements
- Alert body posture (rigid or fidgety)
- Self-harm markings
- Sore fingernails/cuticles from picking
- Slow-healing wounds
- Withdrawn behaviour
- Forgetfulness – missed appointments
- Regular illness and cancelled appointments

Many behaviours could signal poor mental health. However, as St John Ambulance points out, we all demonstrate one or more of these behaviours at some stage so they need to be compared to an individual's usual state.

The relation of these clues to poor mental health conditions comes down to how long they last, as well as how frequent and severe they are[3]. Unless you know your client well, these signs may be lost on you.

What's the takeaway? If you suspect a client has a mental health condition, treat them with respect and actively listen when they wish to suggest a way you could improve their treatment experience.

While any wasted time costs you money, remember that forgotten and missed appointments are often beyond a client's control when consumed by poor mental health.

Once, I was 15 minutes late to an appointment. I apologised, but the therapist told me off (loudly) in the waiting room. What did this achieve? He wasted more time. I felt ashamed, guilty and worthless. I didn't return for further treatment.

What should he have done? He could have calmly asked why I was late to discover I'd written down the wrong time and that their booking process could be improved. Had I received an email appointment confirmation or text reminder, this horrible scene wouldn't have played out.

HOW TO SOOTHE OR AWAKEN THE SENSES

Self-care is one of the best improvements people suffering from poor mental health can make. The Mental Health Foundation[4] offers tips backed by research that can also be transferred to the treatment room:

Nature nurture – I connect with nature to manage my mental health, and its power to nurture the mind has been proven time and again. Why don't you bring the calming effects indoors? Whether you play the soothing sounds of birdsong or embrace the aromatherapy of essential oils, there's plenty you can do to awaken the senses.

Sleep support – Trouble drifting off is common for people with poor mental health. While you won't be there at bedtime, you can help relax the body and mind to prepare them for sleep. Research shows that acupuncture, for example, can not only regulate yin and yang ›



but also increase the content of γ-Aminobutyric acid to enhance sleep quality[5].

Healthy hydration – Those suffering with dry mouths or excessive sweating are going to dehydrate more easily than most. You'll probably offer a glass of water after a treatment or encourage clients to bring their own to a class. But why not encourage drinking throughout and make sure water's always nearby? Herbal tea is also a nice touch to end a treatment and soothe the senses.

Kindness kudos – Loneliness eases with connection. Not only will an act of kindness make you feel better, but a small gesture could make a huge difference. Be warm and welcoming or smile with understanding. This also helps build trust.

Matt Drzymała, who suffers with depression, anxiety, OCD and intrusive thoughts, told me that finding a practitioner who understands him always boosts his treatment experience. He said: "We're not just numbers with cut and paste problems. A brilliant practitioner might have dozens of clients, but they will get to know YOU. Getting to know me and making me feel their treatment room was a safe space really helped. I went from dreading a session to loving it. When they earn your trust, you know you're safe, know the work they're doing will help and – eventually – it helps to improve your mental health."

> "People suffering from poor mental health often find the unknown difficult to bear, while too much information can overwhelm them"

HOW TO SET BOUNDARIES

It's important for you to respect the boundaries of those suffering with poor mental health and set your own boundaries too.

Clear and concise communication is crucial for you both. People suffering from poor mental health often find the unknown difficult to bear, while too much information can overwhelm them.

Consider including a quick phone consultation the day before a treatment or creating a simple email template to send to new clients before their first visit. Include details on parking and check-in procedures, as well as payment and rebooking options.

Consistency is key too. Let ongoing clients know when there's going to be a change to the usual setup. This will protect your own time and energy while reassuring your client they're in safe hands.

Physical touch is another important boundary for people with mental health conditions. It's best to embrace a pro-touch attitude for clients, asking for permission to give a massage or any other hands-on treatment. IT

Katy Lassetter is a writer passionate about holistic therapies. She's worked with aromatherapists to hypnotherapists and manages the social media marketing for the Story Massage Programme. Living with ME and an autoimmune disease for over 14 years provides her with experience using alternative therapies to manage her health, and the empathy needed to write for and about others receiving treatments. Email **katy@chichestercopywriter.co.uk** or visit **chichestercopywriter.co.uk**

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