

Therapy Continuation Groups

Clinic providers who have accumulated large numbers of long-term therapy cases on their panels often find that their panel sizes grow to the point that their patients cannot be seen weekly or even every other week. When wait times for follow-up appointments grow to two or more weeks, it can lead to slower patient progress (especially as use of Evidence-Based Psychotherapies drops off with longer wait times). A common way to help providers who have large panel sizes is to temporarily suspend their requirement to take on new patients. Note that this practice can lead to the clinic not meeting its DoD-mandated Access to Care metric. If a clinic is approaching the 28-day limit on Access to Care, it should not delete intake appointments, but should instead look at other mechanisms to help providers manage their panel size. This handout describes how providers can use Therapy Continuation Groups to manage their long-term therapy cases.

Process:

Clinic providers are able to convert one of their 60-minute follow-up appointment slots into a 90-minute group therapy slot, which will become that provider's Therapy Continuation Group. Providers use these groups to help manage their panel more effectively by transitioning long-term therapy patients from individual treatment into this more appropriate level of care. These groups are intended to be for the provider's own patients, and hence would not be filled with cases from other clinic providers.

Group Format:

These groups are intended to be 90 minutes in length and are interpersonal/process in nature. An interpersonal/process format for the group allows a provider to place a wide range of patient diagnoses into the same group.



Patient Selection:

There are two primary types of cases providers should consider for their group: 1) Patients who have been seen in individual therapy for long periods of time and are now sub-clinical in terms of their symptom levels and 2) Patients who still have enough symptoms to meet criteria for a disorder but have stalled in progress for more than 10 sessions. Both of these types of patients may not wish to terminate treatment, and hence remain on the provider's panel.

Referral Process:

After a Therapy Continuation Group slot has been created, the provider can identify cases that are appropriate for this level of care and discuss this treatment option with each of the patients that they want to refer into the group. Providers can use the patient fact sheet for Therapy Continuation Groups to educate their patients about the group.

Benefits of Starting:

As a provider, there are several benefits to running a Therapy Continuation Group:

- By shifting some portion of your long-term therapy cases over to this lower level of care, there will be more space on your template for seeing the patients who have a higher acuity level, leading to lower levels of risk.

- You will also have more time to attend trainings and formal consultation to learn new therapies, seek informal consultation on your cases, etc.
- You will not have to terminate care for patients who strongly desire to continue treatment with you.

There are also benefits to using Therapy Continuation Groups at the clinic level:

- By not deleting intake appointments, a clinic can help keep their Access to Care metric numbers well under the 28-day requirement.
- If the majority of long-term therapy cases are being treated in Therapy Continuation Groups, the clinic will see its average wait times for follow-up appointments decline.
- Patients seen weekly may recover faster and thus need fewer total number of appointments.

Patients also benefit when a clinic uses the Therapy Continuation Group model:

- For the clinic patients who are sub-clinical but still want therapy, Therapy Continuation Groups offer a venue where they can continue to see their own therapist, rather than being transitioned to another provider or discontinuing care altogether.
- For patients who were in long-term individual therapy, being placed in a Therapy Continuation Group can actually lead to more frequent sessions, since these groups meet weekly.
- If clinics manage long-term therapy cases well, the average patient seeking care can be seen in timely manner, leading to faster recovery and less suffering.