

4th World Congress on
PSYCHIATRY & MENTAL HEALTH NURSING
&
2nd Global Experts Meeting on
PSYCHIATRY AND MENTAL HEALTH

June 17-18, 2019 | Rome, Italy

Utilizing spirituality as a bridge to mitigate social stigma of mental health in the urban and underserved communities: An exploration within telehealth

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It is widely recognized that there are certain communities that the social stigma of receiving mental health is greater than other communities. Thereby telehealth is an excellent option in destigmatizing mental health, especially in marginalized populations. However, the exploration of the client's spirituality is a critical consideration in bridging this gap between compliance to treatment versus noncompliance. Historically, persons of color comprise a significant proportion of those in the underserved communities. And these communities tend to have or had strong spiritual roots. Commonly, the mental health community has largely ignored one's spirituality in the context of mental health. This author suggests that excluding the patient's religious affinity may result in poor therapeutic outcomes despite the use of telehealth, especially within those of disfranchised communities. In fact, in addition to utilizing telehealth, it is recommended that exploring one's spiritual history and connection can serve as an avenue to strengthen the level of rapport, to reduce the social stigma of mental health care, and to engage the patient in the therapeutic process to produce positive therapy outcomes. Ways in which spirituality can be optimized with the use of telehealth are discussed. Recommendations in which telehealth can be further expanded to be more inclusive of patient's spirituality needs are also elucidated and suggestions for further research are discussed.

Biography

Vernita Marsh completed her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Michigan State University and her predoctoral and postdoctoral training from Harvard Medical School, Beth Israel Hospital. Following this training, she completed a fellowship at Massachusetts General Hospital. For several years, she was a clinical psychologist with Kaiser Permanente of Oakland, CA and there she served as the Co-Chief of the Adult Psychiatry Department. Additionally, she has served as a consultant for the Department of Defense for the military and military families overseas. Previously, she has also served as a consultant and therapist for the National Football League treating the players and family members while also serving in the capacity of consultant to the Oakland Raiders. Now for several years, she continues to serve as a therapist for the NBA, for their players and spouses. Currently, she is the founder of a group clinical practice, Dr. Vernita Marsh & Associates. Also, she is the founder of The Marsh Clinics® an organization that addresses the disparities concerning mental health care. Most notably she has served as a consultant, supervisor, and mentor for clinicians. She has published, presented, and offered several trainings on the various topics of mental health.

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