Seeking Services for Mental Health Concerns

There are several systems in place for providing care for mental health issues. Some are in the private sector, some in the public, and some in the non-profit sector. This means the cost of them can vary, but good services can be found in all places.

A few helpful definitions of professionals you might find working in the area of mental health:

**Psychiatrist** – a medical doctor who treats mental health issues. They are a specialist, so normally you require a referral from your family doctor. As a doctor, they are able to prescribe medications. They may be practicing in the health region or in their own private office. Your social worker or psychologist may help you access a psychiatrist if they feel medications or a specific diagnosis may be helpful.

**Psychologist** – a person at a doctoral level, a Ph.D., or a master’s level, M.A., in psychology. They may be employed in school divisions, health regions, or in private practice. Psychologists are trained to work in clinical, research, and medical environments as well as with patients who need therapy. Psychologists are mental health personnel that are trained to test for and officially diagnose mental illnesses, whereas counselors and social workers can only suggest those conditions exist, and refer you to a psychologist for additional testing.

**Social Worker** – usually at a master’s level, an MSW, but can be a bachelor’s level, BSW. They can provide assessment and counseling for depression, anxiety, and other issues. Found usually in school divisions, health regions, community agencies, or private practice. Social workers serve in many communities as the first line of mental health support where psychologists or psychiatrists may be hard to come by. Social workers work to support families hurt by domestic abuse, sexual abuse, substance abuse, and other issues. Social workers also assist individuals’ employment related issues, financial trouble, or any other day-to-day stressors and issues that may be disruptive to your life.

Others you many encounter could be a family therapist or an educational psychologist, both of which should be at a master’s level. It is important that you seek out services with a professional who is registered, licensed, and has a legitimate university degree. This serves to protect you, the client. Note that the words “counselor” or “therapist” do not describe licensed professions.

**How Do you Pay for the Services?**

As mentioned, service providers can be in the private, public, or non-profit sector.

In the public sector, eg. health regions, doctor’s offices, universities, or school divisions, the cost is covered by the payment of your taxes, and so there is not a direct fee charged. There may be a waiting time. However, you will receive the services you require as long as your request meets the mandate of the agency.
In the private sector you pay the provider directly. You may have a plan covered by your employer (EAP), or you may have an extended health plan through your employer (eg. Great West Life), or your own extended health plan (eg. Blue Cross.) If your child has a treaty number, they have health coverage through the federal government, which includes counseling. The plans typically cover you for a registered social worker or psychologist. Your plan may limit the number of sessions that are covered. Some counseling agencies will bill directly, others require that you pay and then get reimbursed.

The non-profit sector includes agencies like the family service bureaus, of which Saskatoon has two, which are specifically geared for counseling. These are Family Service Saskatoon and Catholic Family Services. As well, the non-profit sector includes places like Out Saskatoon, Student Counseling Centre at U of S, the Sexual Assault Centre, White Buffalo, Saskatoon Community Clinic, the YWCA, or religious organizations, who may have a broader mandate, but may have counseling available, or provide referral to counseling. The fees at these places are usually low, or on a sliding scale based on income. They may only offer counseling for specific issues (eg. Sexual assault, LGBQ issues, etc.)

As employees of the health region, we are not permitted to recommend one place over another, or one therapist over another, especially when those are outside the health region. Here are some websites that are helpful. Even though they are American, they provide some good definitions and tips on finding a good therapist for you or your child:


http://lifehacker.com/5874359/how-do-i-select-a-therapist-or-counselor

http://www.webmd.com/anxiety-panic/guide/how-to-find-therapist

http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2010/01/26/10-ways-to-find-a-good-therapist/

We highly recommend that you check out www.sk.211.ca which has links to many resources in our community.

Calling the Healthline at 811 can also be a place to get some initial direction.

At a minimum, there are three main options open to everyone in Saskatchewan to help you navigate this system:

1) every school has access to a school counselor or educational psychologist, and that person is well-equipped to make referrals to your nearest counseling options, regardless of where you live.

2) nearly every health region has Mental Health and Addictions Services. In Saskatoon, the main Intake phone number is 306-655-7777.

3) Your family physician is able to suggest options for counseling and help you determine if you need a psychiatric referral, or not.

If you have questions about accessing services, contact the diabetes team social worker, who can assist you in navigating the system.