The Benefits of Nature for Health and Wellness: An Interprofessional Overview

By Matt Bukowski, MA LPC

OVERVIEW

Spending time in the natural world conveys a variety of developmental, mental health, physical health and stress-reducing benefits for humans.  A growing network of professionals, researchers and policy-makers seek to promote increased contact with the natural world for its benefits to humans and a resulting increase in environmental consciousness.  This information sheet provides an overview of this movement and key resources health care providers can access to promote the health, wellness, and preventative benefits of nature.

TYPES OF EVIDENCE-BASED NATURE THERAPY

-Park utilization

-Horticulture therapy

-Animal-Assisted Therapy

-Nature-based play therapy

-Recreation and wilderness therapy

-Forest Bathing (Shinrin Yoku - *taking in the forest atmosphere)*

SELECTED RESEARCH AND HEALTH BENEFITS

-Li (2010) – Increased natural killer (NK) and other immune cells during forest bathing (FB)

-Morita, et al (2007) – Decreased depression, hostility, higher stress level = greater effect of FB

-Ideno, et al (2017) – In 732 subjects systolic and diastolic blood pressure lower in forests vs. non-forests

WHAT CAN HEALTH PROFESSIONALS DO RIGHT NOW?

- Discuss in clinical settings - create awareness of the evidence-based benefits

- Offer park prescriptions

-Person-centered discussions - how do patients currently relate to nature?

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

-Physical – Be responsive to access limitations because of disability, economics, safety concerns

-Psychological – Individuals may have fear and trauma associated with nature, inconsistency with values

-Best practices and EBP – always be clear about the nature and strength of evidence

RESOURCES

-Park Rx: http://www.parkrx.org/

-Children and Nature Network: https://www.childrenandnature.org/

-Forest Bathing News Story: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0MEFNyLPag

-Facebook: Counselor's Nature Corner

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