

**WATERMAN & ASSOCIATES**  
**PSYCHOLOGICAL & COUNSELLING SERVICES**  
**70 Prideaux Street, Nanaimo, BC Canada V9R 2M5**

**THERAPEUTIC PROCESS? FORGET IT -  
JUST GIVE ME A PILL!**

**Dr. Larry W. Waterman, R. Psych**

We all know that we are living in an age of instant gratification. Instant food, instant messages, instant movies, instant “everything” seems to be the primary goal of our society. Whether we like it or not, the same is true of clients who present requesting assistance in dealing with their psychological and emotional problems. While the historical analytical belief that recovery required several sessions a week for many years has gone by the wayside, the pendulum may have swung too far to the other side.

What many people don't seem to appreciate or understand is that the level of difficulty and the kind of problem(s) that you are facing determines the kind of treatment that is required to successfully reach resolution. That does not mean that the various psychotherapeutic modalities have not tried to address the public's demand for more efficient and effective treatments over shorter periods of time. Cognitive-behavioural therapy, eye movement reprocessing and desensitization, biofeedback, hypnotic interventions and other such specialized skills all serve to help reduce the amount of time spent in therapy. However, clients do need to appreciate that in many cases, it has taken years for them to develop the problems that they now face. Is it really realistic to expect that you can resolve such difficulties in three to five sessions of psychotherapy?

My reference in the title to psychotropic medications hints at what many people see as instant relief. There is no doubt that psychotropic medications can play an important role in the treatment of psychological disorders. In some of the more severe disorders such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, individuals could not function effectively without their medication. However, most other psychotropic medications have definite limitations. For example, if you have a tendency to develop stress headaches, taking an analgesic medication will eliminate the pain in most cases. However, until you address the source of the headaches which is the stress in your life and how you handle it, you will continue to get headaches and continue to require medication. Similarly, many individuals develop clinical depression in reaction to situations over which they perceive themselves as having no control. Until they learn how to cope more effectively with such situations and are able to resolve the difficulties they face, they will usually continue to experience a significant level of depression.

Does medication help? Medication can be very valuable to stabilize the individual's mood, give them enough energy to participate in therapy, and help them to function until they resolve their difficulties. Similarly, antianxiety

medication can be effective at reducing anxiety and panic attacks. However, unless you learn how to control such conditions using other methods, you will have to rely on such medication for the rest of your life.

In our age of “instant gratification”, many people are unwilling or do not understand the need to go through the therapeutic process to really resolve the psychological problems they face. As a result, such problems tend to reoccur numerous times throughout the person’s life. The analogy that I like to use is that of building a house. Unless you establish a firm foundation, make sure the framing is solid, and ensure that all components that go into building a solid and reliable home are in place, you will probably have problems with that house for the rest of your life. Similarly, many “quick-fix” therapeutic interventions may help relieve the immediate distress but do little to resolve the underlying difficulties.

However, in our society the client is in charge. Many people make their decision about a counselor or therapist based on the hourly rate and how quick the person says they can resolve various difficulties. In our practice, we get many people coming to us for treatment who have tried other methods and found them to be ineffective. In choosing any counselor or therapist, I urge you to carefully check their credentials, find out if they have a governing body that sets standards for treatment such as the College of Psychologists or the College of Social Workers, and don’t be afraid to interview the person to determine whether this is someone with whom you can establish a solid rapport. Any ethical practitioner will certainly provide you with information upon which you can make an informed choice. If they won’t, walk away!