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## Summary of Therapeutic Uses Discussion

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## Therapeutic Uses of Outdoor Education Discussion

Michael A. Gass

The discussion of the therapeutic aspects of adventure programs centered around a variety of issues. The areas of the discussion were organized into six categories:

- 1. Examining Treatment Effectiveness.** A large degree of concern was demonstrated pertaining to "what treatment, by whom, is most effective for this client with that specific problem under which set of circumstances." Each of these variables in interaction with each other needs further examination for the validation as well as the development of therapeutic adventure programs. Some of the questions associated with these analyses could include: Are there differences in the effectiveness between inpatient short-term programs and extended wilderness trips? Are there differences in the effectiveness of certain treatment approaches in adventure therapy? For example, is there a difference in the way adventure therapists process and experience? Knowing that many of the concepts of adventure therapy are based on the idea that activities are "unfamiliar" to clients, what is the appropriate level of "activity sequencing" to use with certain populations? What type of research designs would be most appropriate for studying specific types of issues?
- 2. Issues of Training and Competence of Professionals in Adventure Therapy.** In this rapidly evolving field, questions have arisen concerning who is qualified to conduct therapeutic adventure experiences and how (or even should) professional competencies are (be) regulated. Some of the questions associated with the training of professionals included: Who is the professional that is most appropriate to lead the processing/facilitating portion of the experience when working with a social service agency? There are many service providers currently conducting training in adventure therapy practices. Is it appropriate/ethical to do "therapy" in these types of experiences? What guidelines should be followed? How do we test different training models to prove program effectiveness? How do we accommodate for different therapist styles in adventure programming? How long does it take to train an adventure/challenge therapist?
- 3. Integration of Adventure Therapy with other Therapeutic Approaches.** Many of the current models of therapists using adventure experience for therapy have been "hybrid" in nature. As these models are used, a number of questions have arisen: What are the potential benefits as well as the concerns of these models? How do we impact traditional therapists that work with adventure therapists in a positive manner? How do therapeutic adventure programs interact best with insurance companies to acquire/maintain 3rd part payments?
- 4. Treatment Issues.** Certain issues concerning treatment have become apparent in conducting therapeutic adventure experiences. Some of these are that need further research include: What influence do medication have on the adventure process for clients? Further investigation is also needed on the influence that adventure programming has on clients receiving medication. How does the adventure process vary for clients with particular diagnoses? What are certain contraindications for therapeutic adventure experiences.
- 5. Clearer Definitions of Programs.** A concern exists among participants that we need to be able to differentiate between the types of programs delivering adventure therapy services. These programs might be classified by length of time of the treatment, the goals, the level of intensity of treatment, and the level of training of the professional.
- 6. Funding.** One of the concluding concerns was the idea of funding such research projects. Where such monies should be obtained, how quality assurance would be insured, potential impact on various academic departments as well as federal agencies, how support could be acquired from corporations and other funding agencies all were mentioned as concerns.