

Editorial

WELCOME TO THE INAUGURAL ISSUE of *CyberPsychology and Behavior: The Impact of the Internet, MultiMedia, and Virtual Reality on Behavior and Society*. This peer-reviewed journal covers a wide variety of exciting topics of interest to the mental health community. CyberPsychology and Behavior (or CP&B as some have already abbreviated it) is unique in that it is primarily directed to healthcare providers who are interested in clinical applications of advanced media for improving delivery and access to mental healthcare services. As such, the Journal will study the effects of advanced technology use by society at large and also how this technology can be used effectively to reduce the cost of healthcare delivery. Although advanced technology is the theme of this journal, the content will be geared toward the clinician and focus primarily on clinical and experimental studies that examine therapeutic efficacy, objective outcomes assessment, and cost effectiveness in healthcare delivery systems. There are many other excellent sources that focus on advanced computer hardware and software applications, engineering, and systems integration.

A recent survey of over 5,000 primary care physicians from 60 communities in the United States indicated that patients could not easily obtain mental healthcare.¹ Seventy-two percent of the physicians reported not being able to refer patients to outpatient mental health services. The survey further indicated difficulties with access to mental health services and barriers limiting the scope of care and number of approved therapy sessions. This survey was sponsored by the Center for Studying Health System Change.¹

There is a growing interest in investigating whether technologies such as those available through internet access or simple telephone

triage can provide mental healthcare services to a wider population at a reduced cost. Other investigators are attempting to use virtual reality, advanced multimedia, and other advanced computer imaging technologies to treat mental illness such as childhood autism, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and schizophrenia. An article from the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, for example, investigates the growth of the internet and explores potential uses in psychiatric education, clinical care, research, and administrative tasks.² Delivering mental health and preventative services over the internet is being explored in over twenty major institutions in the United States and around the world. An American Psychological Association Task Force recently issued a report covering ethical and legal issues related to psychotherapy services over the Internet.³ Managed care groups are particularly interested in this trend since significant cost savings may be possible. Finally, some unforeseen consequences of rapid and widespread adoption of new technologies are being seen with a new syndrome dubbed "internet addiction."⁴ The first issue of this Journal addresses many of the above topics and will be a forum for the publication of clinical studies and new ideas that both address the effect of new technologies on society and the individual, and alternatively how these new technologies can be used to assess, diagnose, and treat individuals more effectively and at a reduced cost.

Highlights of this issue include two articles on internet addiction (Kandell and Young & Rogers), while a third (Morahan-Martin) investigates the gender gap in internet use. Holmes discusses the delivery of mental health services online while King and Poulos investigate the internet as a vehicle to treat generalized social phobia and avoidant personality dis-

order. Five additional articles evaluate the use of virtual reality in clinical psychology and neuropsychology. Riva uses virtual reality in the assessment of body image and eating disorders. Wiederhold reviews virtual reality as a psychotherapeutic tool. Oyama studies the use of virtual reality as palliative therapy for patients undergoing treatment for cancer. Rizzo *et al.* apply virtual reality for the assessment and rehabilitation of patients with cognitive impairments and functional disabilities. Finally, Mendozzi *et al.* describe a case report using virtual reality in the assessment of coping deficits following cerebral vascular accident.

The editorial board is composed of a distinguished group of healthcare providers who are actively engaged in teaching, research, and clinical investigation using the internet, multimedia, and virtual reality systems.

An additional excellent resource is being made available by one of the editorial board members, Skip Rizzo (arizzo@mizar.usc.edu). He has assembled a list server outlining important information and resources available on the Web concerning virtual reality and mental health (www.VRPSYCH-L@USC.EDU).

The second issue of *CyberPsychology and*

Behavior is in preparation and will cover the Virtual Reality and Mental Health meeting—a one day symposium with Medicine Meets Virtual Reality 6 which will be held in San Diego on January 28–31, 1998 (www.amainc.com/MMVR/MMVR.html).

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