Transition to Collaborative Care at Counselling Services

Starting in September 2017, Counselling Services will be making important changes to the way counselling and wellness services are provided to UVic students. The goal of these changes is to improve access, flexibility, and effectiveness of our service delivery.

Background
UVic Counselling Services has experienced a steady increase in the number of students requesting and receiving services. This increased demand is not unique to UVic; post-secondary counselling centres across Canada are reporting the same pressures. The traditional “50-minute face-to-face therapy hour” is a relatively inflexible form of service. Increasingly, students are seeking innovative services that fit with their busy lives, are integrated with the online world, and fulfill their desires for immediate options and strategies.

What is Collaborative Care?
Collaborative Care is based on the stepped care model which was originally developed for primary health care. It has been successfully re-imagined for rapid access to mental health care in a variety of settings, including post-secondary counselling centres. UVic Counselling Services is following in the footsteps of Memorial University of Newfoundland, University of British Columbia and McGill University, among others, while implementing a UVic version of this model. See link for more information (http://steppedcaretwopoint0.ca/).

Collaborative Care is based on several key principles, including the following:

- Students are usually very busy with courses, employment, extra-curricular involvement and/or family responsibilities; thus, service delivery should be tailored to individual students’ needs and to the extent of time, energy and motivation the student has to commit to the change process.
- Students have primary responsibility for their own psychological health and wellness, and decisions about services and care should be collaborative and iterative.
- Counselling and wellness services vary in terms of their intensity (including effort required of the student).
- Initial access to services should be as rapid as possible.

In Collaborative Care the less intensive services and programs include: campus activities and communities focusing on engagement and prevention, open-access wellness learning through online and print resources, and drop-in groups and workshops. The mid-range services involve pre-registered workshops and groups (e.g., support and personal growth groups). The highest intensity services includes group counselling (e.g., for anxiety and depression), one-to-one individual counselling, medical and/or psychiatric consultation and referral to specialized campus- and community-based services.
What will it look like at UVic Counselling Services?

In the first phase of Collaborative Care, starting in September 2017, all of counselling and mental health services at Counselling Services will first be accessed, very rapidly, through 30-minute intake sessions with experienced counsellors. These will be available throughout weekdays on a walk-in, first-come, first-served basis. In this initial meeting, the counsellor will outline our policies and confidentiality practices and will explain how the Collaborative Care model works. The student will be invited to describe their concern and what they would like to work on. The student and counsellor will then work together to identify what type(s) and intensity of service and support are most appropriate to the student at that point in time. Follow-up sessions could vary in length (e.g., 5, 15, 30 or 50 minutes) and frequency (e.g., weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly). The counsellor and student will engage in ongoing assessment of the student’s level of functioning, well-being and progress.

The second phase of Collaborative Care at Counselling Services will involve an introduction of a technology platform which includes embedded assessment tools to assess and monitor students’ mental health and life functioning, and their motivation for change. This type of platform is being used efficaciously at other institutions. This phase will complement and enhance the ongoing assessment that is already a core component of Counselling Service’s work, and will ensure that students are always actively involved in counselling options and decisions. Counselling Services team will update the campus community when this phase is ready for implementation.

Input and Feedback

Counselling Services view the implementation of this model as dynamic and evolving, therefore eager to work in partnership with UVic students, staff and faculty as Collaborative Care model is developed and implemented. Please contact Dr. Rita Knodel (rknodel@uvic.ca), Director of Counselling and Multifaith Services, and Dr. Ai-Lan Chia (achia@uvic.ca), Associate Director of Counselling Services, for any questions, concerns and feedback.

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