

Chapter 9

A Solution Focused Consideration of Cyberchondria

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors consider the digital space and its technologically enabling effects on clients suffering from cyberchondria. Anonymised accounts are used to explore how, in the digital space of cyberchondria, rational people like Paul, Simon, and Tracy are broken down into assembly of compulsive behaviours and anxiety, always with an escalating nature. Using solution focused techniques like 'the miracle question', 'exception seeking', 'problem free talk', and 'detailing scales', the authors share their experiences of the murder and snake oil that is cyberchondria. They review how the literal and hypothetical ideals of solution focused practice offer new perspectives to the treatment of cyberchondria as clients require not logic but hope to retake control of their post-cyberchondria recovery.

INTRODUCTION

The authors recognise how life changing the digital space is for clients suffering from cyberchondria and it is with heavy hearts that they consider the dangers its technologically enabling effects have. It is the immediate and connected nature of the digital that tempts clients to compulsively check their healthcare status, suffer escalating anxiety, recheck their suspicions just to find themselves in out-of-control cycles, once the reserve of second year medical students. So, the authors note, how the digital space is probably a beneficial thing, but for a growing few it represents a relationship with all things existentially health related. Using anonymised accounts from 3 clients (Paul, Simon and Tracy), the authors explore how their solution focused approach underpinned by theories and key philosophical concepts of Baudrillard, Latour and Actor-Network-Theory offers something different to the treatment of cyberchondria. They

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consider how both the literal and hypothetical ideals of solution focused practice offers new perspectives into new modes of relating to health.

In addition, and by way of analogy, the authors employ the metaphor of murder and snake-oil to suggest that the digital playground for all its usefulness is also a place where more and more are falling victim. In an age of unprecedented connection and information overload, cyberchondria operates effortlessly in the mass of fake news, spurious truth and a general collapse of authority. Its cycles assimilate logics of choice, rationality and neutrality that are ready-made to seduce susceptible clients within increasing cycles of escalating anxiety and easily recruited by technological advances and the associated claims made by such progress. In this chapter, the authors use clients' accounts to explore how, in the digital space of cyberchondria, rational people are broken down into nervous wrecks and subsequently require not logic, but rather hope to retake control of their post-cyberchondria recovery. By using solution focused skills including strange sounding things like 'the miracle question', 'exception seeking', 'problem free talk', 'detailing scales' and 'externalising', the authors share their experiences of the digital murder and snake-oil that is cyberchondria.

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

Part 1 introduces and defines cyberchondria, solution focused practice and the authors' theoretical position to suggest that 'difference' lies in the digital. In this sense, they offer a semiotic exploration and positioning.

Part 2 considers how digital disorders are organised, self-referential and how they operate in the consulting room. The authors offer an introduction to solution focused techniques.

Part 3 brings theory and practice together to suggest a number of interventions for digital detectives to help self-monitor and stay safe. The authors offer some alternatives for negotiating the digital and off-line lives when struggling to overcome health and personal concerns.

To achieve these aims, the chapter appreciates the increasing significance of cyberchondria and how its presence, like that of brute-facts, symptom checking and the rigor of professional expertise is experienced by most of us in a search for digital answers (alibis).

PART 1: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this section the authors intend to do 3 things. First, introduce the digital space and how their 25-year interest in solution focused practice (suspiciously the same time the authors have emerged digitally) helped negotiate their understanding of how cyberchondria has become something that all those years ago didn't exist. Second, and as already suggested, the authors offer the notion of cyberchondria as analogy for murder. Then third, they explore how the digital space operates just like the deception of the snake oil touting trickster of the past. These 3 things (perfect crime, perfect pathology and perfect context) are metaphors for explaining how people make the online and offline choices they do. Furthermore, the section argues that the digital space has a range of illusion akin to any charlatan from the wild west. It is one thing being responsible for one's own health, but another when the tools used to do it are perfectly sharpened to exacerbate escalation.

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