

Caring for the Commonwealth

VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION FOR MARRIAGE & FAMILY THERAPY

Fall 2010

MESSAGE

FROM THE PRESIDENT



Hello Virginians,

We are excited about our newsletter's renewed beginning! Many thanks to Scott and Kristen Fowler for their willingness to organize, write and edit. Our intention is a quarterly e-newsletter, a forum for sharing information and opinions. We would like to see your name on the bylines too. What have you been reading, studying, teaching, thinking or curious about? Ideally, our newsletter will reflect the interests and needs of our members, start discussions, answer questions and provide a networking opportunity. When you contribute, we would like contact information so that your Virginia colleagues can be in touch with you.

Sending my best,

Julia Sayre, M.S., LMFT

MFT - One of the Best Careers: Two Perspectives on the Implications!

by Steven Ecker and Shelby DeBause

By now, you may have heard that, in December 2009, US News and World Report declared Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT) one of the best careers in 2010. How could they make that claim? It appears that the news came from the US Department of Labor Statistics. As one of their many functions, they track occupational trends as one measure of an overall monitoring of economic patterns within the United States. They estimated that MFT employment

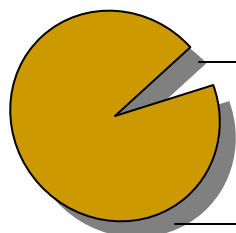
SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- **MFT: One of the Best Careers (1)**
- **The Experience: Have you Ever? (2)**
- **Pediatric Partners (3)**
- **Holidays Unleash Emotional Flood (4)**
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demands will rise 14% between 2008 and 2018. Perhaps, it is equally noteworthy that of the 665,500 counselors of all types employed in the United States only about 4% (27,300) are Marriage and Family Therapist. What are some of the likely implications of that increased demand? As many of you know, we have a unique perspective on the work we do. Are we up to the challenge of work in the twenty first century clinical arena?

We thought it would be interesting to compare points of view. One is that of an older clinician with years of experience in the public and private sector. The other is that of a new practitioner who completed a residency in the public sector and recently began working in the private sector.

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4% (27,300) MFTs
665,500 counselors of all types

MFT employment demands will rise 14% between 2008 and 2018

MFT-One of the Best Careers

Perspective 1



Perhaps an increase in demand suggests more people will be seeking assistance for the very specific skill set of a clinician trained in Marriage and Family Therapy. What are the skills they may need and how are they best delivered? Some potential younger clients are likely to be internet information savvy and searching for quick straightforward answers to relationship challenges. They may be well informed, want practical straightforward solutions, and have limited resources of time and money. The provider needs to be affordable, knowledgeable, and easily accessible. Client contact is likely to be short with relatively well defined problems. Get the job done quickly and move on may be the agenda. Others may have been in a long-standing relationship that has grown weary after years of employment and parenting. They could be wondering if a committed relationship is right for them and can they manage the emotionally complex, costly process of separation or divorce. They too are likely to want answers but may be ambivalent about their choices. Whatever direction they choose could seem painful and undesirable.

An effective therapist is expected to be highly competent, with well developed communication skills, and able to deliver sometimes uncomfortable therapeutic strategies in clear language. In addition, the provider may experience residual stress that, if not managed well; will deter eagerness to provide further services. Effective, affordable training and skillful, accessible supervision may be prerequisites of an effective practice of marriage and family therapy.

So the implications of increased work are likely to require well developed effective skills, easy public access, reliable stress management techniques, opportunities to discuss treatment experiences with either a supportive, knowledgeable colleague or readily accessible supervisor and varied inexpensive cutting edge training opportunities.

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The Experience:

Have you ever sat at a red light on your way home from the office and wondered if you were in the right field? Did you ever end a session and think you were the next Master Yoda of therapy? Or maybe you looked in the mirror and wondered what has taken Oprah so long. Have you ever wondered just how good of a spouse you have to be to feel justified doling out marriage and family expertise? Certainly, you have all the right answers for your clients while your children nominate you for parent of the year. Friendships are easy for therapists, right? Of course your neighbors and fellow parishioners don't try to pull you aside seeking a few pointers for their lives while you are getting your mail or walking to your car.

The experience of being a therapist is unique. It has its ups and downs. But where can you go to see your reflection? Look at how therapists are depicted in the media. We can be portrayed as strange and quirky or make for a heartwarming story. Most of the time you can't tell which is the

comedian or the "shrink". Have you seen the Geico commercial (the one with the drill sergeant as a therapist)? When you stop to think about what it is like to be a therapist, who understands you? We all face the challenge of overlapping personal and professional lives. What is that like for you?

In future editions of the VAMFT Newsletter, there will be included a section called, "**The Experience**". This will be an inside look at the heart and mind of a therapist. It will be written anonymously with the intention of giving us all an avenue to relate to one another. It will be all of our stories. There is no need for solutions here—only the raw truth of what a therapist goes through each and every day.

All submissions will remain confidential between the editor and you. If writing poses too much pressure, but you would like to be included, send an email to the editor expressing interest and you will be guided, interview style, through the process. If you have an inclination for writing, send your stories to the editor at ccs@cox.net. Again, it will remain anonymous and confidential.

If you read "**The Experience**" and have comments, send them to the editor and those may be included in the next edition.

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Steven L. Ecker, Ph.D., is vice president of the central division of VAMFT. He is a clinical member of AAMFT. He holds a doctorate from Virginia Tech's Marriage and Family Therapy Program along with degrees in counseling and psychology. He is licensed as a Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT) and as a Professional Counselor (LPC). Currently he is a Clinical Supervisor at a community service board (CSB) and maintains a private practice in Richmond.

Pediatric Partners

by Julie Sayre

The *Washington Post* reported recent findings from the journal, *Pediatrics* that demonstrates increasing awareness of treating the whole family from a biopsychosocial view. Specifically, the article commented on the need for pediatricians to conduct a routine screening of new mothers for depression, as between 5 and 25% are believed to experience postpartum depression, which can affect their newborns developmentally.

The concern and recommendations in the article reflect systemic thinking about both awareness of a potential problem and positive solutions that can have far-reaching effects. Supportive therapy for depressed new mothers is, say the pediatricians, part of the child's wellness plan, something MFT's have known, and is now reflected via the medical model.

MFT's in private practice as well as in agencies, have an opportunity to share information about how we can help. The field of pediatrics has now taken a stand that considers acting on the cyclical relationship between a mother's emotional wellness and her infants'

wellbeing. As MFT's, we know that the next step is to widen the therapeutic circle to include significant others also affected by a newborn's birth.

Let your local pediatricians, family practitioners and OB/GYN's know what you do and how you can help. This is a win-win: MFT's know we can be helpful and this is exactly the sort of systemic need that we can respond to with certainty. And please do share your efforts and success stories through our website - blogging makes our modern world go 'round and sharing knowledge makes us better at what we do! ✨

Julia B. Sayre, M.S., LMFT is in private practice in Leesburg, VA. You can reach her through her website at:

www.relationshipcenterofloudoun.com

MFT-One of the Best Careers

Perspective 2

An increase in demand for MFT's may reflect the trend towards clients recognizing the extent to which their issues are related to how they operate in relationship with others. In this "communication age" and "information era", people need to interact effectively with not just family members, but co-workers and society at large in order to function well within our current culture and to feel a sense of inclusion. In short, perhaps clients are recognizing the contextual nature of their problems, even if they are unable to articulate it in that manner.



Clients are also more consumer savvy about therapy than ever before. They have ready access to a wealth of information about whatever they perceive their issue to be, as well as access to information by and about literally hundreds of therapists. Whether the problem is anxiety, addiction, or interpersonal problems, today's client will likely have a knowledge base about it gathered from several different sources they have gathered, such as online or through television programming. Clients may reject the idea of their therapist as the unquestioned expert, and might be looking for a more collaborative approach to treatment.

Clients may also expect therapists to be accessible in ways besides traditional in-office counseling services, and to meet their needs fast. To meet the demands of the modern client, the therapist may likely find that she or he needs to provide computer-based counseling options, such as sessions taking place over webcam. Today's client is not limited by geography, and can literally choose a service provider anywhere in the world. In this fast-paced society in which we live, clients may become impatient with a therapist they do not feel is helping them reach their goals quickly. The therapist may find an increased need to dialogue with today's client regarding the client's satisfaction with services.

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Shelby DeBause is the Eastern Region Vice President. She is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist. She holds a Master's degree in Marriage and Family Therapy from Appalachian State University in Boone, NC. She also attended East Carolina University, where she received her Bachelor's degree in Family and Community Services. Mrs. DeBause has experience working with a private foster care agency, a rape crisis center, and a psychiatric hospital in addition to her experiences in outpatient practice. She is currently a Senior Clinician with Genesis Counseling Center in Hampton, VA, where she enjoys working clinically with a diverse group of individuals and families.

HOLIDAYS UNLEASH EMOTIONAL FLOOD

by Larry L. French

The Madison County flood of June 1995 was one of the worst flash floods that Virginia has ever seen. When a disaster strikes, we want to use all the resources available to prevent its reoccurrence. A thorough investigation is needed to establish the cause. Having discovered critical factors causing the disaster, then begins the work of developing a strategy to protect against it happening again.

In reviewing the causes of the Madison flood, it was revealed that a combination of factors was responsible. There was a slow moving moist air mass on the east side of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The soil conditions were already saturated from the rains earlier in the week. In a relatively short period of time, more than 20 inches of rain fell. Very quickly the streams, creeks and rivers began to rise. Suddenly the waters overflowed the banks, flooding everything and destroying some lines of communication.

Notice any similarities between the Madison Flood of '95 and the "Holiday Emotional Flood" in which we nearly drown year after year? It is as if we are powerless to do anything about the ever rising tide of emotional stress. What can be done to give some relief?

First, even before the holidays arrive, our "emotional ground" is already well saturated. Most families are so stressed just managing to keep their noses above water with the daily demands of nurturing children, caring for elderly parents, managing a household, earning an income and more. Many families are just about to drown even before the "Holiday Flood" arrives.

Second, there is a "heavy emotional downpour" in a relatively brief period of time. There is an incredibly high expectation that this is to be, as one song puts it, "It's the most wonderful time of the year."

Whether you celebrate Hanukkah, Christmas or Kwanzaa, each family, as well as each individual family member has a different idea as to how the "dream holiday" looks and what needs to happen to make it a reality. This is where the tributaries begin to converge and overflow the banks.

Family members of different religious beliefs have many different expectations. Other potential areas of conflict involve the putting up of decorations and how much money to spend on gifts. Some family members are generous and want to give something to everyone. They are willing to "hock the farm"-which results in huge debts (another major downpour).

The conflicts escalate. One family member wants a real tree and the other wants an artificial tree. One wants multicolored lights and the

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What to do:

1. Keep a sense of humor. Holidays are actually supposed to be fun. When your holiday plans fall apart, keep in mind that you have just created a memory that will be laughable for years to come.
2. Evaluate and adjust your "unrealistic" expectations that everything has to be perfect in order for the holidays to be meaningful.
3. If you are single, it's important to cultivate some close friends who will "adopt" you into their family-especially for the holidays. (Families, invite singles to join you.)
4. Develop meaningful traditions that may be unique for your family. This will help create family identity and unity.
5. Keep communication lines open. It is the only way relationships can improve.
6. Help someone who is less fortunate. (Not just at this season but throughout the year.)
7. Take inventory as to how your life is progressing. If your "emotional ground" is saturated and it's still pouring, you might consider developing a long-term strategy for simplifying your lifestyle. This may be the only way to stop the repeated cycle of annual flooding.
8. Slow down and take time to meditate on the real meaning and spiritual significance of the holidays. For instance, Christmas traditionally celebrates the birth of Jesus - a gift of love to the world.

Larry L. French is the Founder & Executive Director of the Virginia Center for Family Relations, in Charlottesville and Staunton. He is a Licensed Professional Counselor and Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist. Larry is an Approved Supervisor and has been a member of AAMFT since 1976.

— Dr. Ted Zeff —

According to the National Association of School Psychologists, **160,000** children miss school every day in the United States for fear of being **bullied**. School-related bullying has led to depression and poor school performance in many children. Read about how to detect and prevent bullying in school by going to the following links:

“Six Warning Signs that a Child is Being Bullied.”

<http://www.drtedzeff.com/news/warningsigns.php>

“Five Strategies to Prevent a Sensitive Boy from Being Bullied.”

<http://drtedzeff.com/news/preventbullying.php>

Dr. Ted Zeff is the author of "The Strong, Sensitive Boy." For more information on the book please visit Amazon.com/StrongSensitiveBoy.

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Editor Thoughts: We are the People

Scott & Kristen Fowler

The VAMFT Newsletter has been on hiatus. Now **we** are refreshed and ready to face the challenges of technology and life. There are many competitors for our attention, both professionally and personally. I believe this newsletter can be both a form of professional growth and identity while serving as an escape from the office. Like an episode of Two and a Half Men can make you laugh and shake your head while realizing the writers really do have a clever understanding of relationships.

Who are the **we** referenced? **We** are the people who Virginians count on for help in a struggling world. **We** are the people who represent experts in the mental health field. **We** are the select few who understand the systemic implications in all situations. **We** are the clinicians who recognize the importance of relationships, both formal and informal. **We** are husbands and wives; sisters and brothers; mothers and fathers; sons and daughters who persist in helping to alleviate others' pain while maintaining our own.

This publication is our creation. Each member of the Virginia Association for Marriage & Family Therapy has an invitation to become co-creators of a fluid movement. We each have value to the profession and the greater society we practice within. In a busy world of soccer games, administrative paperwork, PTA meetings, CE's, swim practices, and oh yea—clients, this is easy to forget. In a world of Facebook, LinkedIn, texting, and even old-fashioned email, we somehow find it easier to feel disconnected in things that matter to us. I may know that my best friend from high school took 240 pictures today, but was she able to enjoy the photography experience?

In talking with our President, Julie, and the other Board Members, it is clear there is a mandate for a more meaningful organization. Strength comes from numbers and information is powerful. Your participation in future newsletters is more than welcome—it is essential. Consider this edition as a primer. Look for future editions to promote you, your ideas of mental health and the therapy arena, ways you keep balance in your life, what keeps you going, practical applications of systemic thinking to the business world, and so on...

Send comments for any article, ideas for articles, or stories of client experiences (of course maintaining confidentiality) to ccs@cox.net. ✨

Scott & Kristen Fowler are Marriage & Family Therapists and Licensed Professional Counselors. They maintain a private practice, Connected Counseling Services in the Newport News area.

They can be reached at www.connectedcounselingservices.org
Follow us on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Connected-Counseling-Services/142744989083628>

Support our Military — Give back at — www.giveanhour.org

MFT-One of the Best Careers

In this era, where the ability to function in relationships determines individual success more than in any one previous, it makes sense that we as marketed and proclaimed “relationship experts” are experiencing growth in our field. It seems that we agree on a few basic premises regarding the 21st century MFT: we as therapists may find that we need to be excellent communicators across several mediums and that we must stay educated about treatment techniques and client needs. Ongoing training and active participation in some form of supervision seems essential to being a relevant provider in the knowledge rich, competitive culture in which both we and our clients exist. ✨

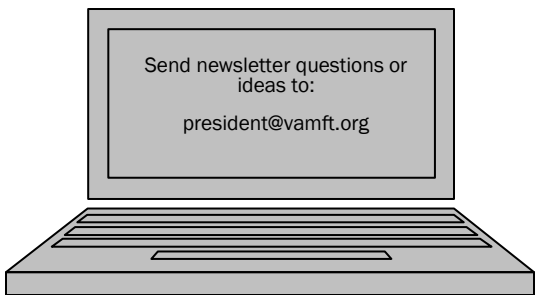
Holidays Unleash Emotional Flood

other doesn't want a tree or lights at all. The list of potential areas of conflict is endless. Where we'll spend Christmas Eve or Christmas Day-your family or mine? “My family's holiday traditions are more meaningful than your family's.” What parties will we attend? How much do we eat or drink? In divorced families, the questions arise, “Which parent will have the children and for what day?” Oh, the stress to find that perfect gift or at least an acceptable gift. How do we deal with the in-laws' holiday expectations?

As the tensions mount, the inevitable happens: emotions flare and the “flood waters” begin to cut off all lines of communications. Let's face it; we are in real deep water now. Though the flood forecast seems dire to many, families can do much to rescue themselves from the rising waters. (please see *What to Do* for suggestions) go to page —4— ✨

VAMFT

Virginia Association for Marriage & Family Therapy is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to promoting the well-being of families, couples, individuals, and businesses through the advancement of the profession and practice of marriage and family therapy in the Commonwealth of Virginia.



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