Title: Metaphor and Meaning in Grief Therapy: A Case Study of Sibling Loss

Speaker: Louis A. Gamino, PhD, ABPP, FT

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Summary:

Use of metaphor has a storied history in psychotherapy as therapists frequently paint word pictures with images and similies to convey understanding and to expand the frame of reference to include new possibilities of thought or emotion. Meaning reconstruction approaches to grief therapy, in particular, prize the use of co-crafted schemas of meaning evolved by the therapist and patient working together to devise ways of rebuilding a sense of coherence to the griever's life story damaged by the loss of a loved one. Video excerpts from a case study of sibling loss illustrate application of these important uses of metaphor and meaning.

Learning Objectives:

1) Describe two uses of metaphor as a tool in psychotherapy.

2) List four empirical correlates of adaptive grieving.

3) Identify three goals of meaning reconstruction in grief therapy.

4) Discuss the process of "working within the metaphor" in grief therapy.

APA Standard D: Curriculum Content

D1.1
While “working within the metaphor” in grief therapy is not a new practice, recent advances in the field of psychotherapy have begun to formalize how the process of externalizing metaphors can be carried out systematically in solution-focused (Clarke, 2014) or other brief therapy interventions (McGuinity, Armstrong & Carrière, 2013). These newer protocols are described, then their application is illustrated through video presentation of an interview with a bereaved sibling.

Target Audience/Level of Activity:
The target audience for this activity includes physicians, psychologists, social workers, licensed professional counselors, chaplains and allied mental health professionals. The instructional level of this activity is intermediate with some experience in providing mental health services desired.

Practice Gap:
Literature shows that health professionals in general, including mental health clinicians, often have less “comfort” and facility in addressing issues related to dying, death, and
bereavement than other forms of life stress or trauma (cf. Kvale, Berg, Groff, & Lange, 1999).

Informal conversations within the Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Science confirm this phenomenon as existing implicitly in subjective self-assessments of professional fluidness working with end of life populations.

Today’s program is aimed at closing this gap by helping physicians, psychologists, and other health care professionals to “transfer” ongoing skills in use of metaphor in psychotherapy to specific applications in grief therapy.

References: