



SUMMER/FALL 2008

S I E R R A T U C S O N
P R O G R E S S

“Facing the Challenges of Eating Disorders and Comorbidity”

By Jeannette Rojas, LASAC, EAP II

“I have had eating disorders for many years and have been in treatment many times. I started with anorexia, and then became bulimic. I started using drugs three years ago. It seems that when I start purging, I end up using drugs and don’t know how to stop. My therapist believes I have to work on trauma, but I don’t know were to start, I don’t know if there is hope for me...”

~Mary, 26 years old (fictitious name)

Sound familiar? It can be a challenge to help people who struggle with comorbidity. Effectively treating such clients often takes more than what you can provide in your individual practice. What resources are available? What can truly make a difference? Sometimes, inpatient treatment is needed. A safe environment is crucial to process traumatic events, which are likely a part of the patient’s history. In addition to therapy and supervision to stop the abuse of food, alcohol, or drugs, an integrative approach is required to address the whole person and heal from within. The Eating Disorders Program at Sierra Tucson provides essential therapeutic elements with an individualized treatment plan. Our bio-psycho-social-spiritual approach offers a full range of options, including medical care, group and individual therapy, Twelve-Step work, nutrition and exercise plan, body imagery, restaurant out-ing, experiential and integrative therapies, and a dynamic Family Program. And, importantly, innovative treatments such as Nutra-ceuticals, Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) Skills Training, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), Somatic Experiencing®, and Equine-Assisted Therapy distinguishes Sierra Tucson as a leader in the eating disorders field.

Sierra Tucson’s staff are specialists in meeting the needs of males and females suffering from eating disorders, i.e., anorexia, bulimia, binge eating, and overeating, as well as patients with coexisting conditions such as alcohol, drug, mood, or trauma issues. Experienced professionals work with patients to successfully overcome emotional problems and behaviors that can destroy their lives.

This 45-day program is designed to help patients break through denial, experience unconditional acceptance, and restore wholeness of body, mind, and spirit.

Nutra-ceuticals

Patricia Herman, N.M.D., Ph.D., implements integrative medicine with eating disorder patients. She advises that due to the usual suboptimal nutritional status of eating disorder patients and the deficiency symptom profile of a number of nutrients, e.g., mental disturbance of various kinds, one key component of Sierra Tucson’s Eating Disorders Program is the use of a full nutraceutical regimen. This includes essential fatty acids, multi-vitamin/mineral supplementation, and nutritional and herbal support for mood, insomnia, and digestion. The success of this strategy has been obvious to staff but was recently tested through an in-house retrospective controlled cohort study.¹ As chronic insomnia and chronic constipation are common problems for patients with eating disorders, the study focused on the effectiveness of nutraceutical treatments for these conditions. Although neither of these symptoms is central to these patients’ pathologies, both reduce the energy and attention available to devote to the work needed for recovery and create barriers to refeeding. Specifically for insomnia, patients are given instructions on sleep hygiene and, where appropriate, either an herbal product (containing Valerian root extract, Rhodiola rosea root extract, Hops strobiles extract, Passion flower aerial parts extract, and German chamomile flower extract) or

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5-hydroxytryptophan (the metabolic precursor to serotonin and melatonin), or both are prescribed. With regard to constipation, plant-based digestive enzymes at mealtimes and a daily probiotic supplement containing *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* are given to almost all eating disorder patients on admission to promote overall digestive health and to prevent the GI problems commonly experienced upon refeeding. Results of the study show that the nutraceutical support for insomnia allowed the number of conventional sleep medications prescribed to be decreased by over half with no loss in reported sleep satisfaction. In addition, the use of digestive enzymes and probiotics substantially reduced both reported constipation and the use of conventional constipation medications.

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) is incorporated into all aspects of treatment. DBT evolved from Marsha Linehan's effort to create a treatment for women who struggle with several issues. She developed a comprehensive, evidence-based Cognitive-Behavioral treatment for borderline personality disorder, which is effective for eating disorders, as well. With Sierra Tucson's team approach, every member of the treatment team, including the dietitian, unit therapist, evening/weekend therapist, fitness specialist, and eating disorder technician, will use DBT while working with patients. Additionally, patients have a DBT session on a weekly basis during process group, in which the therapist, dietitian, eating disorder technician, and other staff participate. Lee Roach, R.D., confirms, "The dietitian introduces the patient to the concepts of distress tolerance during individual sessions. Patients are initially challenged to use

stress tolerance techniques during meals and then to expand the practice to any distressful situation during treatment. Eating disorder patients are provided with their own small dining room, which facilitates their practice of mindful skills." Proficiency in mindful skills helps the patient focus on the present. This involves learning to be non-judgmental, observing the event, describing the situation, participating in the activity, and attending to one thing at a time.

Patients are encouraged to use self-assessment sheets to evaluate their degree of hunger and satiety, feelings during meal time, and use of mindful skills. To reinforce the importance of self-assessment, the program includes a self-assess level system, which contains all components of the program (including therapy, family, fitness, and nutrition). All patients start on the first level, with an opportunity to gain increased autonomy by completing specific behaviors in every component of the program. The eating disorder staff work together as a team, implementing group case conferences, daily debriefings, and interventions to prevent team splitting.

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)

It is common for eating disorder patients to struggle with comorbidity such as trauma, self-harm behaviors, and addictions, and the frequency of sexual abuse in eating disorder patients is significant. As Maureen O'Connor-Strout, M.C., LPC, EMDR Therapist and Coordinator, describes, "Memories are presented often with trembling, anxiety, sweating, and flashbacks or nightmares that can trigger new memories. Panic attacks are not

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Letter from the Executive Director Keith P. Arnold

Dear Friend,

There comes a time in everyone's life when they are faced with a decision, when either choice you make contains opportunity and sadness, confidence and doubt, opening up and letting go.

That time has come for me, and I have decided to transition from Sierra Tucson to another opportunity in August. I cannot articulate the mixed feelings I have in leaving such an incredible organization, with even more incredible people. I have been so blessed and am so grateful to have been part of this unbelievable healing center. I am equally indebted to the wonderful professionals and facilities in this international community that have supported Sierra Tucson and my growth.

Sierra Tucson will always be a premier facility specializing in co-occurring disorders and effective, compassionate care. I am very confident in the management team and their ability to carry on Sierra Tucson's rich tradition of clinical excellence and a holistic-progressive model of care. Our new Medical Director, Rob Johnson, D.O., is phenomenal and will continue to promote innovation and move the organization to higher levels of clinical sophistication.

With great support from CRC, Sierra Tucson has never done better. Given the challenging economic times, our record census and program development is amazing. This, again, is due to your faith in us and the passionate care of our staff.

We will take time in finding the right candidate for the next executive director to lead Sierra Tucson in its continuing development. You see a glimpse of our dedication to comprehensive treatment in this newsletter, and you can rest confidently in Sierra Tucson's steadfast commitment to you and to our patients.

We are all part of something bigger. We have our piece in the mosaic that fits together to create miracles. Thank you for the opportunity to serve you and help guide Sierra Tucson during this time. Like many of our patients, this experience has changed my life forever and is the foundation to carry me forward. Thank you for your care and



All the best,

Keith P. Arnold
Keith P. Arnold

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To Register, contact ICDS: Ask for Anne at 866-523-2669
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uncommon. Eating disorder patients at Sierra Tucson benefit by participating in EMDR, which has been proven to be effective in reducing the trauma-driven component of an eating disorder.” Maureen goes on to say, “With EMDR, patients are able to identify feelings or ‘overwhelming emotion’ as an ‘emotional memory of how I responded then (to a traumatic event) and not how I feel today.’”

At Sierra Tucson, EMDR is used to reduce symptoms of PTSD (including dissociation, flashbacks, and nightmares, as well as depression and anxiety); complicated bereavement; phobias (e.g., fear of flying—to reduce triggers for relapse at the airport upon discharge); and compulsive behaviors, including eating disorders, sexual compulsivity, gambling, shoplifting, and overspending—all of which can be driven by unresolved trauma.

Somatic Experiencing®

One integrative therapy utilized for the resolution of trauma is Somatic Experiencing®. Most individuals who present with eating disorders have at their foundation a dysregulation of the nervous system. Maya Youngblood, LPCC, LMT, a Somatic Experiencing® Practitioner at Sierra Tucson, believes that this type of therapy is integral to transform and heal a trauma survivor’s nervous system. Maya explains that the body is the theatre for playing out the repressed emotions and sensations that foster regulation. Somatic Experiencing® is a process that assists in reconnecting to sensations and feelings in the body in a gentle and safe way. Because most eating disorder patients hate their body, it is a challenge to find a way to reconnect that doesn’t activate the defense structures. As patients become more comfortable with tracking sensations in the body, they are already working with nervous system regulation. As we help them to establish internal and external resources, we then are able to work with completing the thwarted fight/flight responses. Many eating disorder patients avoid working with these strong energies through freeze/dissociation. Fight/flight/freeze states happen unconsciously as the nervous system perceives threat or danger. Having well-established resource states for soothing the nervous system

allows a Somatic therapist to address the thwarted energies of the fight/flight/freeze states. We offer sensorimotor exercises and processes to access these thwarted energies, which need to be discharged for the nervous system to regulate. As patients become more aware of the fight/flight/freeze states, they can utilize tools and skills to help themselves move out of the dysregulation and into the resource states of calming and soothing. As the nervous system physiology begins to resolve, the developmental issues emerge to be explored and processed. The eating disorder patient can develop a healthy and realistic relationship with his/her body.

Equine-Assisted Therapy

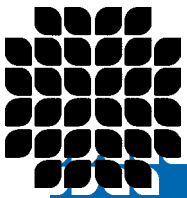
The Eating Disorders Program at Sierra Tucson also provides Equine-Assisted Therapy, in which the therapist uses horses as a tool to process emotions. Eating disorder patients usually have difficulty understanding or communicating how they are feeling, and they use tend to use food for this purpose. Equine-Assisted Therapy sessions facilitate the expression of feelings. The focus of this therapy is not in riding or horsemanship, as it takes place 95% on the ground. In each session, patients work through metaphors and body language as they learn to recognize dysfunctional patterns of behavior and identify healthy relationships.

A Full Integrative Approach to Healing and Restoration

A very significant choice you make for your clients with emotional and behavioral disorders is who you choose to help you provide treatment. We know how important your clients are and how dedicated you are to offering the best care. At Sierra Tucson, we also understand our patients’ deep emotional pain and are committed to working together with each individual, referring professional, and the family to give the most compassionate and comprehensive treatment available.

By Jeannette Rojas, LASAC, EAP II

¹ Ross C., Herman P., Rocklin O., Rojas J. Evaluation of integrative medicine supplements for mitigation of chronic insomnia and constipation in an inpatient eating disorders setting. *Explore: The Journal of Science and Healing* 2008 [in press].



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*Meet Jeannette Rojas, LASAC, EAP II
 Unit Therapist & Coordinator, Eating Disorders Program at Sierra Tucson*

Sierra Tucson was fortunate to welcome Jeannette Rojas as a Unit Therapist in December 2004. After studying at ANAHUAC University in Mexico City, Jeannette became a Clinical Psychologist and received a diploma (post-graduate degree) in Substance Abuse and Alcoholism. She is certified as a Level II Equine-Assisted Psychotherapist (EAP II) through EAGALA and is also a Licensed Associate Substance Abuse Counselor (LASAC) in the State of Arizona.

Jeannette’s work history provides a depth of experience. After working in psychiatric hospitals in Mexico City for a couple of years, she coordinated services for Employee Assistance Programs with one of Mexico’s largest corporations. She then helped develop the first treatment center in Mexico for eating disorders, trauma, and addictions, assuming the roles of Director and Vice President.

To gain more knowledge of the various models and philosophies of treatment, Jeannette visited many treatment centers in the U.S. in 1999. She found Sierra Tucson’s bio-psycho-social-spiritual philosophy superior to all others, as the Sierra Model® completely integrates mind, body, and spirit.

Jeannette developed a nonprofit organization called Avalon Foundation for Women that is dedicated to prevention and financial assistance for those needing treatment. She spoke at conferences all over the country, with profits benefiting the foundation. Jeannette

also created a CD for teens as a prevention tool against alcoholism, drug use, and eating disorders. Her scope of service included marketing, admissions, and alumni services, and she received a medal from the University for her work over the years for “Leadership in Psychology.”

In 2004, Jeannette accepted an offer to join Sierra Tucson as a therapist. She now coordinates the Eating Disorders Program and serves as Unit Therapist for a nine-patient process group. This includes work in body imagery, DBT, and the Family Program; plus restaurant outings with patients and dietitian; maintaining communication with the referring professional; and assisting with Continuing Care Planning. She also provides training, coordinates Eating Disorder staff team building, and speaks at conferences.

Jeannette knows that every patient is different and believes that those with eating disorders tend to be very bright. “I am challenged to be proactive and try new techniques, and I learn every day!” says Jeannette. “I like to work together with staff as a team because you always get better results with the cooperation and the knowledge of many. And I very much enjoy being a part of the patients’ change. To see a person change and heal is the biggest gift.”

