


VIRTUAL REALITY THERAPY FOR PHOBIAS

OFFERED BY:
THE COGNITIVE BEHAVIOR
THERAPY PROGRAM FOR
DEPRESSION & ANXIETY
DISORDERS



**SUNY Upstate Medical University
Adult Psychiatry Clinic
713 Harrison St.
Syracuse, N.Y. 13210**

Virtual Reality Therapy (VRT) for Phobias

The Virtual Reality Treatment Program at SUNY Upstate Medical University's Adult Psychiatry Clinic offers a new human-computer interaction form of therapy for individuals with anxiety disorders due to fear of flying, heights, public speaking and storms. After an initial diagnostic interview is conducted, to ensure that the service is appropriate for the presenting problem, participants are placed in a computer-generated three-dimensional virtual world and guided through the selected environment. Participants learn to gradually tolerate and cope with anxious physical reactions and thoughts as they are exposed to their feared situations. The therapist guides the participant through every stage of their virtual exposure. Research indicates that 6-12 sessions are required to achieve maximum benefit and generalization to real life situations is excellent.

The advantages of VRT include:

Increased control: VRT involves exposing the patient to a virtual environment containing the feared stimulus in place of taking the patient into a real environment or having the patient imagine the stimulus. The real environment can be unpredictable and standard exposure leaves much to chance. The therapist, through the computer keyboard, controls the virtual environment ensuring exposure to the programmed situations.

More efficient treatment & ease of scheduling: Standard exposure can be very costly because it usually requires leaving the therapists office and therefore extended sessions. VRT can accomplish the same exposure with the standard therapy hour (45-50 minutes) and within the confines of the therapist's office. Multiple sessions can be scheduled within the same week.

Less risk to patient's confidentiality: Since therapy is conducted in the therapist's office and not in a public place, there is little risk to the patient's confidentiality.

Better chance for insurance reimbursement: Many insurance companies will not reimburse for extended sessions required for standard exposure therapy when leaving the office is essential. VRT occurs only in therapist's office within a regular 45-50 minute session.

Unlimited repetitions of feared situations: The use of VRT allows the therapist complete control over stimuli needed for exposure. Standard exposure therapy is bound by real world limitations. For example, only one take off and landing per flight. VRT allows the therapist to manipulate situations to best suit the patient. For example, the therapist can repeatedly expose the patient to a take off, landing, turbulence etc...

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