

The Sibley Report

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...valuable information to make your job and life easier! To suggest topics, please call Angela Veri, National Director of Customer Relations. Sibley & Associates is a national disability management firm with close to fifteen years experience, nearly 300 staff/consultants and advanced technology.

The Nocebo Effect ...& how it may affect client recovery

Through reading or discussion, most of us are familiar with the term "Placebo Effect". It is the measurable, observable or felt, improvement in health or behaviour that is reported after taking a medication or treatment that actually has no therapeutic value.

Accordingly, fake therapies are often referred to as placebos. Placebo is Latin for "I shall please". For example, a placebo could be a saline solution or starch tablet that produces an effect similar to what would be expected from an authentic substance like an antibiotic. Researchers attribute the placebo effect to the person's expectation of what outcome the medication or treatment he or she believes it should produce.

But what about the Nocebo Effect? The Nocebo Effect is described as "a phenomenon that is opposite to the placebo effect, whereby expectation of a negative outcome

may lead to the worsening of a symptom".¹

This is particularly relevant in relation to determining where and how clients receive treatment, because recent experimental evidence indicates that negative verbal suggestions can trigger anxiety about impending pain and, in fact, facilitate pain. Simply put, this means anxiety and pain can be induced solely by a negative environment and/or negative psychological state of the client.

It is important to be aware of both the placebo and nocebo effects and what impact positive and negative expectations of pain can have on recovery. It reminds us to ensure our clients are treated by – and surrounded by – positive influences. Please see the attachment for the Abstract of a study about the Nocebo Effect.

¹When Words are Painful: Unraveling the Mechanisms of the Nocebo Effect, Neuroscience 147 (2007) 260-271

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