

# Professor links psychological research to practice

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New research by a University of Tennessee, Knoxville, psychology professor aims to bridge the gap between how psychotherapy is studied in laboratory research settings, and how it is actually conducted in real-world clinical practice.

Michael R. Nash, a professor in UT Knoxville's Ph.D. Clinical Psychology program, hopes the research paper, published in this month's issue of *American Psychologist*, will help close a divide in the field and lead to a better understanding of what works best for patients.

"By carefully tracking a patient's symptoms before and during treatment, psychologists and psychiatrists can conduct perfectly sound scientifically grounded case studies out of their own office," said Nash, who co-authored the study with UT alumni Jeffrey J. Borckardt of the Medical University of South Carolina and Mark Moore of Pennsylvania Hospital.

*American Psychologist* is the banner journal of the American Psychological Association, and Nash is the first UT professor to publish an independently submitted research article in this influential venue, though others have published association task force reports and commentaries.

Historically, there has been a rift between clinicians and researchers over how to study psychotherapy. Researchers often dismiss case reports from clinicians as not scientifically valid. Clinicians, on the other hand, worry that most laboratory research is just not applicable to their daily

practice because it takes place in a highly controlled environment -- one that doesn't reflect how psychotherapy is done in actual practice.

Nash and his co-authors lay out what they call a "user's guide" on how practicing psychologists can apply scientific research techniques to their day-to-day work. The authors describe a research method known as the case-based time series design which can be applied to one or just a few patients.

In essence, the time-series design involves tracking the patient's symptoms very closely before, during and after treatment, and then applying specialized statistical analyses to detect whether there is reliable improvement.

"[Time series] studies can speak to issues that the traditional randomized studies can't," Nash said, adding "These studies can reveal not just whether a patient improves during the course of treatment, but how the improvement unfolds over time."

The time-series approach is now a routine part of the treatment protocol in the UT Psychology Clinic, providing ongoing information on how patients are progressing and what works best.

Added Nash: "Hopefully, harnessing time-series methodologies alongside large-group laboratory designs will accelerate the progress we are making in understanding how to take better care of our patients."

Source: University of Tennessee at Knoxville

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