

The Voice of Telemedicine: Dr. John Silver

This is the second post of our "voice of telemedicine" blog series. An opportunity for telemedicine practitioners to share their experiences with telemedicine. Today's guest blogger is Dr. John Silver:

### **A Retrospective of my 20 Year Voyage through Cyberspace**

***FREE SEX THERAPY!*** That was how my psychotherapy practice was listed on AOL if you were on the Information Superhighway in 1995 searching for "Therapy in Los Angeles." Thus began my trip through Cyberspace 20 years ago.

I turned to the "Information Superhighway" to spread the good word, driving up the on ramp at snail-like speeds with a personal computer, Windows 3.1 and a dial-up modem. My little old computer brought back memories of 20 years before while working at the RAND Corporation where we did some of the early work in the integration of computers and psychology. In those days computers took up entire walls and the Internet was called the Arpanet and was used to link the government and universities together (in case of nuclear attack). In 1991 the Arpanet became the World Wide Web (or the Wild Wild Web as it was called) and was accessible by anyone with a personal computer and a telephone line. Webcams were not in use yet and Internet pages took sometimes 2 minutes to load. Communication was by email and chat (Instant Messages they were called). There would be no Skype until 2003. I decided to use the World Wide Web as a vehicle to reach out and help more people than I could in a little psychotherapy office. I learned about the new Internet and taught myself how to build and code websites for maximum exposure (now called Search Engine Optimization or SEO). In designing my website, I thought free email advice was a good way to help more people using my years of experience and training in Psychology. One of my certifications was as a Sex Therapist. AOL (the main Internet Service Provider (ISP) and search engine at the time) serendipitously combined Free Email Advice with Sex Therapist on my Website, resulting in search results as FREE SEX THERAPY.

### **Online Therapy And Counseling Until Midnight**

During my private practice years with Counseling Until Midnight, I had learned all I could about Telemedicine. I had obtained Certification in Online Therapy. I studied what minimal information was available regarding the integration of law and ethics as it applied to online therapy. I developed my own telemedicine informed consent forms, contracts and other documents in order to protect the client and structure a professional psychotherapeutic relationship. Cable Internet and Skype had evolved so that Webconferencing was now available, though the audio and video were primitive at best.

Continued,

## **My 20 Year Voyage through Cyberspace, continued**

I spent the next 5 years taking every online course offered, reading all the latest articles on telemedicine and refining my online therapy practice to ensure it met all clinical, ethical and legal standards. My combination of clinical skills, coupled with my experience in online therapy, moved my practice forward, and I was able to expand it further by answering hundreds of email questions from around the world. I felt I was qualified to make clinical decisions as to what type of patient and what type of therapy would work for Telebehavioral Health.

Since “Counseling Until Midnight” was still coming up in search results, I attached Online Therapy to the name and became “Online Therapy and Counseling Until Midnight”. It took about 2 years of intensive work doing SEO and website composition to solidify my position in relevant search results. As a result of my efforts to monitor my traffic and fine tune my outreach tactics, my practice had migrated back to the top of most searches for Online Therapy. I had begun during the Wild West of Online Therapy, evolved with the times and now am practicing the Art and Science of Telemedicine.

*John Silver, PhD*

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