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PREVIEW RESPONSE

Psychiatric Practice: Beyond Individual Pathology to Promotion of Growth and Flourishing



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Psychiatry has historically focused on individual pathology, but in recent decades has broadened in scope to include social determinants of health and, influenced by positive psychology, Fourth Wave therapies aimed at promoting growth [1]. The term mental health is heard now more often than mental illness, but no consensus exists on a definition that could provide a telos for these efforts.

The empirical and philosophical work of the Human Flourishing Program is therefore particularly timely and important. Five of the six major domains of flourishing are directly relevant for clinicians:

- Happiness and Life Satisfaction: General contentment and joy.
- Physical and Mental Health: Overall well-being and freedom from illness.
- Meaning and Purpose: Having direction and a sense of value in life.
- Character and Virtue: Pursuing moral goodness and acting with integrity.
- Close Social Relationships: Strong bonds of love, friendship, and community.

For Christian clinicians, thinking clearly about the ultimate meaning and purpose of human existence, realized in relationship to God, helps to define our calling, and the vision we hope our patients achieve. Two of the several ways we can help patients flourish are by embodying and encouraging the virtues that make a life worth living [2]. Aiming for flourishing can also help us understand how problems such as moral injury and suffering relate to threats to goodness, and how we can implement recovery.

End Notes

[1] Peteet JR. A fourth wave of psychotherapies: moving beyond recovery toward well-being. Harv Rev Psychiatry. 2018;26:90-95.

[2] Peteet JR (ed). The Virtues in Psychiatric Practice. Oxford University Press, 2022

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