

More people are turning to therapy for help coping in troubled times By ANDREW ABRAMSON

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It isn't just people who have lost their jobs who are stressed out these days.

It seems like everyone, from the human resource manager who knows layoffs are coming to the single mom who lost half her portfolio, is coming in droves to see area psychiatrists.

Connie Ingram 'People have not been previously challenged,' the psychotherapist from Royal Palm Beach says.

'Now that we are in a huge challenge economically and politically, they don't have the strength to cope.' Ingram says she's treating an additional 10 to 12 clients a week.

"A lot of it is that people have not been previously challenged," said psychotherapist Connie Ingram of Royal Palm Beach.

"Now that we are in a huge challenge economically and politically, they don't have the strength to cope." Ingram said she's treating an additional 10 to 12 clients per week in the last 18 months, while Fort Lauderdale-based psychiatrist Gabriela Cora said

she's seen a "drastic increase" in patients.

At the Oakwood Center in West Palm Beach, a clinic that treats patients who can't afford private care as well as patients with severe problems, calls to the center are up 25 percent while admissions to the clinic — both voluntary and involuntary — are up 12 percent in the last four months, according to Chief Medical Officer Suresh Rajpara.

"What I've seen mostly is difficulty with sleeping, insomnia, anxiety, stress and definitely depression," Rajpara said. "As part of the anxiety and depression, there are persons with suicidal thoughts."

While prescriptions for antidepressants, mood stabilizers and anti-anxiety drugs are on the rise, so are prescriptions for drugs treating physical ailments, Cora said.

"Someone is having gastro problems, an ulcer has just been diagnosed, and now they're anxious and depressed with heartburn problems and their blood pressure has picked up," Cora said. "It's not just psychiatrist medications that are being prescribed, but medications for medical issues that do worse when someone has tremendous stress."

Therapists are seeing behavior that's different from before the downturn.

"It's interesting how many people have expressed disappointment with God," Ingram said. "People are always questioning their purpose in life, that's some of the same things we always deal with, but the intensity is much more increased."

The issues people are struggling with are relatively the same from before the economic crisis, but Ingram said patients are taking their frustrations to another level.

"When people are angry, they're not shouting at one another — now they're pushing, taking their keys and taking off, drinking more," Ingram said. "There's a lot more substance abuse."

At the Oakwood Center, Rajpara is also dealing with a large increase of patients with substance abuse problems.

"I have seen a big jump in the last six to eight months," Rajpara said. "When people go through stress and economic hardship, unemployment, they tend to gravitate toward substance abuse to relieve anxiety, stress. Of course they temporarily feel better, but down the road it leads to more problems."

Mike Horwitz, a local real estate broker and a patient of Ingram's, said most people don't need a therapist to tell that person what's wrong with them, but need the guidance of a therapist to lead them in the right direction.

"My own agents have been dealing with problems very significantly, and they talk to me," said Horwitz, who himself coaches people to set goals. "It's easy for me to help them, but it's very hard to get my own personal perspective."

"With therapy, somebody else can look at your problems, help you understand what's important, and take a look at some of the positive things going on. It's real easy to get caught up with the bad things of the day."

Ensuring that they see a doctor while they have insurance is one thing that Cora attributes to the increase in patient load.

"In fear of losing their job, they want to see somebody right now while they still have insurance," Cora said.

Ingram, who is trained in critical incident debriefing, said she's been called to work with bank robbery victims eight times since January, after only dealing with about eight robberies in her entire career.

"People will stop at nothing right now," Ingram said. "It's more intense out there, and we get the fallout from that."

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Memo: Do you feel more stressed because of the **economy**?

ALTERED BEHAVIORS POINT TO EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

THE TOLL OF STRESS: More people are turning to therapy for help coping in troubled times.

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It seems like everyone, from the human resource manager who knows layoffs are coming to the single mom who lost half her portfolio, is coming in droves to see area psychiatrists.

They're doubting God, turning verbal altercations into physical ones, and looking to alcohol and drugs to help deal with tough times.

Local private therapists and doctors are seeing significantly more patients as the **economy** has tumbled.

"A lot of it is that people have not been previously challenged," said psychotherapist **Connie Ingram** of Royal Palm Beach. "Now that we are in a huge challenge economically and politically, they don't have the strength to cope."

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