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**GPA Wins
APA Award for
Outstanding Achievement**

Psychotherapy: The Talking Cure

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All the greatest and most important problems of life are fundamentally insoluble... They can never be solved, but only outgrown.

Carl G. Jung

At the turn of the century a young Viennese physician made a fairly remarkable discovery. Sigmund Freud learned that the symptoms of hysteria, a prevalent illness affecting primarily women at that time, were caused by early childhood trauma and could be successfully treated by having the patient talk freely about their experience. Freud called his technique psychoanalysis, and his patient, Bertha Pappenheim, later came to call it "the talking cure."

Freud's genius was in understanding that many emotional and physical problems in life can be caused by earlier trauma. It was a radical concept that illness could be treated not only with the physiological interventions of a physician and with the spiritual interventions of a priest but also by the simple act of talking to an analyst.

One hundred years later we are finally gathering the evidence to prove Freud correct. James Pennebaker and his colleagues have demonstrated the effects of therapeutic talking on both physical and emotional health. He demonstrated that subjects who talked about traumatic and stressful experiences had fewer physical illnesses and measurable improvements in their immunological system functioning when compared to those subjects who did not talk about their experiences.

Today we, as psychologists, treat a wide range of problems in living — from depression and schizophrenia to marital and family problems, from alcoholism and substance abuse to traumatic experiences such as combat, natural disasters and crime. Psychotherapy is not just for the "worried well" or the chronically mentally ill. Many people who are functioning reasonably well in their lives come to see us because they want more from life, they want to be better parents, or learn how to be closer to other people.

Consumer Reports magazine recently published the results of a study of four thousand of their readers, the largest survey ever of consumers of mental health services. Over half of the people who rated themselves as "very poor" to begin with said that psychotherapy "made things a lot better," while another third said that it helped their problems "to some extent." Those who saw a trained mental health professional reported a higher level of satisfaction with their care than those who consulted a family physician. In addition the longer people stayed in therapy the more benefit they received, with those staying in treatment six months or longer reporting greater gains than those who left earlier. Those who were in psychotherapy alone reported doing about as well as those in psychotherapy along with medications.

Not only is psychotherapy effective, it is one of the most cost-effective health care modalities. Studies have consistently shown that the savings in subsequent health care costs, decreased absenteeism and increased productivity more than equal the cost of providing psychotherapeutic benefits.