

Camila

Camila is a 40-year-old Honduran woman who has lived in DC since 2005. She moved to the District with her adolescent son to reunite with her husband of 20 years. She left behind three daughters in Honduras, ages 17, 12, and 6. The oldest daughter is a deaf-mute who looks after the younger two.

In May 2008, Camila displayed symptoms of depression during a primary care visit. She was immediately screened with a Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) to determine the severity of her depression. As part of Columbia Road Health Services' (CRHS) Depression Health Disparities Collaborative program, patients are screened for depression at their primary care visit and referred to our counselors for faster treatment. Camila scored an 18 on her first PHQ-9, which signifies moderate depression. The factors causing Camila's depression were threefold; she had just separated from her husband after a long history of infidelity and physical and verbal abuse; she was away from three of her children for an indefinite period of time and unable to communicate verbally with her oldest daughter; she was being exploited by her employer, working two dollars below minimum wage and sixty hours a week.



Mental Health Counselor Debra Vekstein discusses which short-term goals a patient should begin to accomplish during a counseling session.

Camila and I began to meet weekly to address each of these issues and to create treatment goals. First, I encouraged her to share more of her feelings about her estranged husband and the effects his abuse had on her, as well as the difficulties of being a newly single mother. We discussed ways in which Camila could feel connected to her three daughters in Honduras. I encouraged her to begin writing letters to her oldest daughter to establish a direct line of communication between them. In order for her to receive fair pay at her job, I encouraged Camila to go to the DC Employment Justice Center. Camila met with an attorney and the Center took on her case. Camila began the process of documenting her hours and obtaining a copy of her work schedule.

Camila quickly began to show signs of steady improvement after we started to work towards her treatment goals. Over the next few months, I met jointly with Camila, her estranged husband and son to emphasize the importance of her son having the dual support of his parents. In August, Camila learned that her husband had a new girlfriend and was spreading false rumors about her to their friends. I was pleased that she was able to effectively express to me her feelings of anger and frustration. We continued to discuss the recovery timeline of ending a twenty year relationship and what the healing process entails. In June she won her case against her former employer and was awarded \$15,000 in back pay.

Five months following her first PHQ-9, Camila retook the screening in October. She scored a 1! By pinpointing depression at her primary care visit, we were able to treat Camila's depression before her problems became unmanageable. I am proud of her progress.

Debra Vekstein, MS, LPC
CRHS' Mental Health Counselor