Objectives

- Background on Hoarding
- Safety/health issues involved with hoarding
  - Are there any precautions we should take for our safety?
- Measurement/Assessment Tools
- What to do when we encounter a homeowner with a hoarding situation:
  - How to talk with them re: hoarding concerns
  - How to offer resources
FAQ: What is hoarding disorder? Hoarding is a mental health disorder with public safety implications.

Quick answer: A new diagnosis with the DSM5, the common definition has 4 parts:
1. Excessive acquisition of stuff
2. Difficulty discarding possessions
3. Living spaces that can’t be used for their intended purposes because of clutter
4. Causing significant distress or impairment

FAQ: What’s the difference between clutter, collecting, and hoarding?

Quick Answer:
- **Clutter**: possessions are disorganized and may be accumulated around living areas
  - No major difficulty with excessive acquisition AND no major difficulty discarding items
  - Can carry on normal activities in home
- **Collecting**: new possessions = part of larger set of items
  - Display does not impede active living areas in home
- **Hoarding**: possessions become unorganized piles of clutter
  - Prevent rooms from being used for normal activities
  - Motivation to display items: lost
FAQ’s: How many people hoard?

Quick answer: More than you think but we’re really not sure yet
- Estimates range greatly—up to 15 million in the U.S.
- Studies haven’t been big enough to give accurate estimates yet

Prevalence
- 2.6% of the population (Iervolino et al., 2009; Samuels et al., 2008)

On the high end, that means that over 342 million people on the planet meet criteria for moderate to severe hoarding behavior.

That’s approximately 15.7 million people in the United States.

FAQ’s: Are some people more likely to hoard than others?

Quick answer: Research shows that
- Men and women hoard equally
- Older people hoard more than younger people
- People with lower income (Samuels, et al. 2008) hoard more than people with higher income

FAQ: What causes hoarding?

Quick answer: lots of things can contribute to hoarding—like biological, psychological, and social factors.

The BIOPSYCHOSOCIAL Model of Hoarding Disorder states that:

1. Hoarding behavior arises from a variety of external and internal variables that are biological, psychological, and social in nature.
FAQ’s: What are the Biological Factors that contribute to hoarding?

- Family history/genetic link
- Brain functioning differences
  - Occipital and frontal lobes (Saxena et al., 2004)
  - These are the parts of the brain that are responsible for visual things and executive functioning (see below)
- Information-processing (cognitive) deficits
  - Attention
  - Memory
  - Categorization
  - Complex thinking
  - Decision-making

FAQ’s: What are the Psychological Factors that contribute to hoarding?

- Mental health/emotional distress
  - Unresolved trauma and loss
- People who hoard have specific beliefs about and attachment to their possessions (Frost & Hartl, 1998)
  - Feelings toward object
  - Memory-related concerns
  - Desire for control
  - Responsibility and waste
  - Aesthetics
- Hoarding behaviors can be reinforced over time (Frost & Hartl, 1998)
  - Acquiring things makes us feel good, so we want to do more of it
  - Getting rid of things makes us anxious, so we want to do less of it

FAQ’s: What are the Social Factors that contribute to hoarding?

- Intergenerational relationships
  - The better family connections (past and present), the less hoarding (Kempers & Harris)
- Social support
  - The more support experienced from family, the less hoarding (Kempers & Harris)
- Major life events/transitions
  - Unresolved trauma and loss contribute to hoarding (Kempers & Harris)
- Social stigma
  - “Hoarding is weird”
  - Stigma can contribute to depression, anxiety, etc.
- Culture
  - Western, consumer cultures = hoarding is present
  - Not sure about other, non-consumer-driven cultures
  - Consider context (e.g., refugee families, etc.)
Co-morbid Diagnoses

- Hoarding Disorder is also associated with lots of other mental health issues:
  - 57% major depressive disorder
  - 28% social phobia
  - 28% generalized anxiety disorder (Frost et al., 2006)
  - 30-40% OCD (e.g. Barlow et al., 2005)
  - 31% Organic Brain Illness
  - 30% Personality Disorders (Mataix-Cols et al., 2006)
  - 20% ADHD (e.g. Sheppard et al., 2010)
  - Dementia (Hwang et al., 1999)
  - Eating Disorders (Frankenburg, 1984)
  - Substance abuse (Kennard et al., 2008)

FAQ: Hoarding must be some sort of coping mechanism, right?

Quick answer: It depends.

Trauma has been related to hoarding in the research:
- Traumatic life events (Cromer, Schmidt, & Murphy, 2007; Hartl, Duggany, Allen, Steketee, & Frost, 2005)
  - 76% endorsed a history of a traumatic life event (Hartl et al., 2006)
  - 55% stressful life event around onset of hoarding (Grisham et al., 2006)
- Relational trauma

But it can also be considered a reinforced behavior that occurs over time because of difficulties with:
1. History/vulnerabilities
2. Information-processing deficits
3. Beliefs about possessions
4. Emotions
5. Reinforcement

FAQ: Does therapy work come before, during, or after work on the hoarding problems?

Quick answer: It depends. Oftentimes, we can do them simultaneously when safety and coping skills are in place.

Rule of thumb:
1. Safety first.
2. Skills second.
   - Emotional regulation (self-soothing)
   - Self-awareness/mindfulness
   - Organization, categorization, etc
3. Everything else can follow.
   - Grief, loss, and trauma
   - Hoarding work: acquisition/discard
FAQ: Can't I just clean out my loved one's home?

Quick answer: Not if you can avoid it.
- It can do more harm than good.
- Can be traumatizing
- Even threats can be unethical
- Can ruin relationships and trust

“In all three instances of going in and cleaning these places up, within weeks of relocating the individual back into a clean environment, the individual passed away...it was such a dramatic change for them because we didn’t realize the impact of the sociological change.” (Brace, 2007)
- It’s not sustainable
- Higher relapse rates among forced clean outs
- You’ll just have to do it again later
- Sometimes it’s necessary though
- Involve the homeowner as much as possible for lasting change

FAQ: At what point is this reportable to the authorities?

Quick answer: If there is a threat of endangerment to the health and safety of:
- A child/minor
- Older adult (over 60 with a cognitive, physical, or functional impairment)
- Person with disability or dependency
- Animal you must report (if you are a mandated reporter)

Building codes differ from city to city and county to county, but general safety concerns include:
- 3 ft. pathway through home (EMT’s, gurneys)
- Working smoke alarms
- Cleared entrances and exits
- No flammable materials

FAQ: What's up with animal hoarding? Is it the same thing as object hoarding?

Quick answer: There are some similarities between the two, but they differ in several ways.

Research on animal hoarding is about 20 years behind object hoarding

Know that people who hoard animals began with the best intentions, they did not intend to harm animals.

Similarities:
- Acquisition, difficulty discarding, clutter, distress
- Many people who hoard animals also hoard objects
- Co-morbidities

Differences:
- Animal hoarding: squalor (100% of homes)
- Gender and age differences
- AH: More women; later age
- Types of objects:
  - Objects: variety
  - Animals: one species
- Lack of treatment for AH
- MAJOR mental health concerns (a mental health professional must be involved)
FAQ: What resources are available?

Quick answer: There are several different resources that are available to people who hoard, their families, and people who work with them.

Non-profit agencies:
- The Hoarding Project (local)
- International OCD Foundation Institute of Challenging Disorganization
- Children of Hoarders

Support Groups
- The Hoarding Project (local)
- Children of Hoarders
- Clutterers Anonymous

Reading Resources
- Stuff: Compulsive Hoarding and the Meaning of Things (2010), Frost & Steketee
- Digging Out: Helping Your Loved One Manage Clutter, Hoarding, and Compulsive Acquiring (2009), Tompkins & Hartl
- Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief (2000), Boss
- Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People for Change, 2nd ed. (2002), Miller & Rollnick
Co-sponsored Webinars

Next Webinar – September 23 at noon
The Healthy Brain Initiative
with Jan Mueller, Alzheimer’s Association Minnesota – N Dakota