

Distance Therapy Comes

Recent studies show that psychotherapy delivered through

Gabriela (not her real name), a 42-year-old investment counselor, has been receiving therapy by computer chat for more than a year now. She fell into a deep depression after her last breakup and needed an ear she could count on to be consistently supportive and objective. She had face-to-face therapy years ago after she lost a child, and she thinks it is overrated. With chat therapy, she can look back at the e-trail and relive therapeutic moments. She can also see her progress in black and white.

Linda (also not her real name), 57 and divorced, has been receiving chat therapy for more than two years. She participates in one session a week and pays less than half what she would pay for an in-person encounter. "And there's no wasting time on chitchat about the weather," she says. "We get right down to business." Her therapist has helped lift her out of a debilitating depression that began when she was trying to console a grieving friend. But she has never seen her therapist; she has never even heard his voice.

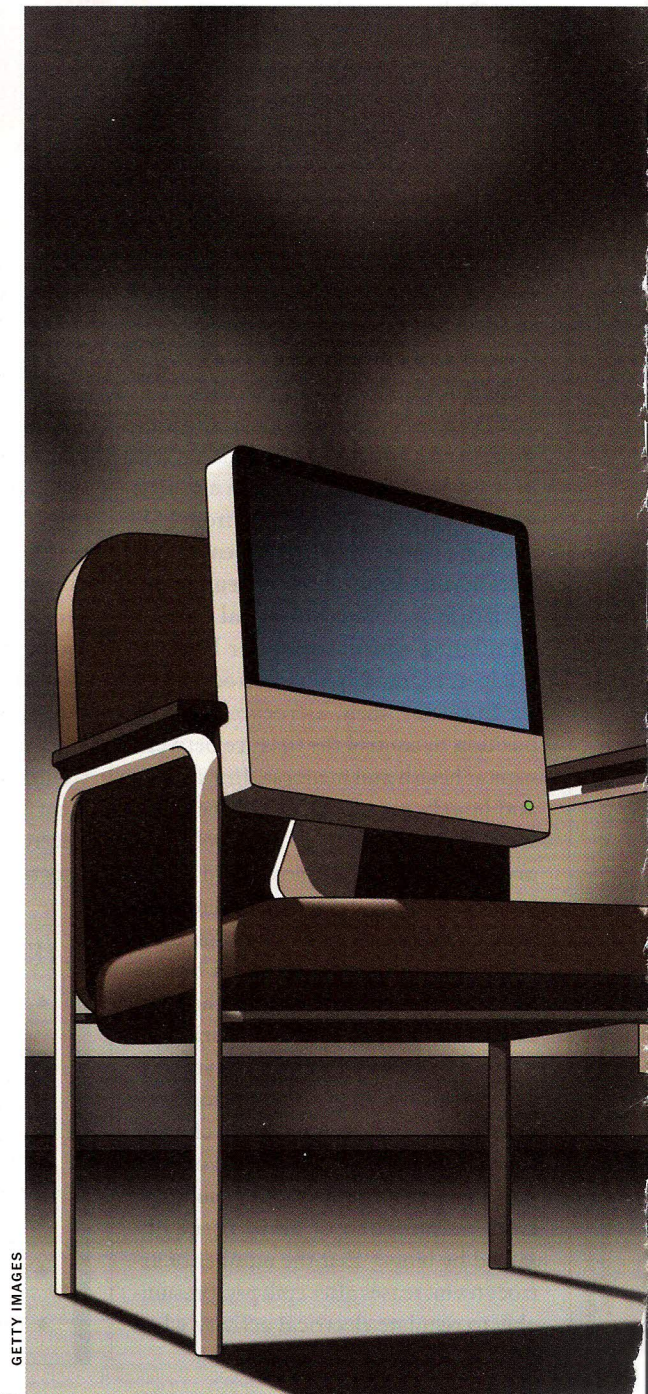
As for the distance aspect of these therapeutic conversations, both Gabriela and Linda have similar and somewhat curious perspectives. As Linda put it, "What distance? He's right here in my own house! There's an immediacy to our interaction, and I've shared things with him I've never shared with any other therapist." Gabriela says that in face-to-face therapy she sometimes edited what she was saying to avoid negative facial reactions by the therapist; chat therapy has allowed her to be "completely honest."

Linda and Gabriela are each clients of therapist Carl Benedict, who is based in Hagerstown, Md. Linda is 2,653 miles away in San Diego, Calif.,

FAST FACTS

Remote Consultations

- 1**» Research now demonstrates that psychotherapy delivered via e-mail, video, chat, voice or texting can effectively treat cognitive, emotional and behavioral disorders.
- 2**» Even brief therapeutic communiqués using mobile phones can help combat eating disorders, alcohol abuse, cigarette smoking and anxiety, among other problems.
- 3**» The number of electronic tools for treating mental health troubles is rapidly increasing.



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