Treating Religious Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
with Elyssa Kushner, PsyD (Philadelphia VA Medical Center)

Workshop Overview
Exposure and response prevention (ERP) is the gold standard of psychosocial treatment for Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). However, patient motivation to fully engage in and complete treatment remains a considerable barrier to the implementation, as ERP involves encouraging patients to confront their greatest fears. For example, for a patient presenting with OCD related to fear of germs, treatment involves coming into physical contact with feared objects in order to confront the possibility of contracting a life-threatening disease. Through ERP, patients can learn the necessary information to disprove their fears. What happens when OCD has religious overtones though? What does ERP look like when a patient’s feared consequences involve excessive fear of going to hell, or fear of punishment by God? Does treatment involve confronting actual sin by facilitating transgression on the part of a patient? Would such an approach even be effective when the beliefs are less disprovable? Perhaps for these reasons, scrupulosity, or religious OCD is one of the more debilitating subtypes of OCD, which has considerable treatment resistance. Treatment of this unique disorder requires both an understanding of the fundamental components of ERP as well as culturally-informed modifications to determine appropriate treatment targets, describe the rationale for treatment, enhance motivation, and ultimately improve adherence to the protocol. This workshop will present guidelines for the treatment of religious OCD. Attendees will learn about some of the common challenges of implementing ERP to treat religious symptoms, and strategies to overcome these difficulties. More broadly, this is an opportunity to further develop an understanding of how to provide the highest standard of care for religious patients.

Program
In this ½-day clinical workshop you will learn:
- The evidence-base for ERP and hypothesized mechanisms of effect
- How to present a rationale for ERP when patients have religious symptoms
- Guidelines for how to effectively utilize ERP to meet the needs of religious patients
- How to determine whether patients are simply more observant vs. scrupulous

Date, Time & Location
Sunday, July 1st, 2012
12:00pm-4:00pm
Center for Anxiety
116 West 23rd Street, 5th Floor New York, NY 10011
Phone: 646 837 5557
Email: info@centerforanxiety.org
Web: www.centerforanxiety.org/training.html
Intended Audience
This workshop is designed for mental health professionals including psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, nurses, chaplains, and counselors. Graduate students, fellows and residents are most welcome to attend. No previous familiarity with cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) or exposure and response prevention (ERP) is necessary. A basic working framework of CBT and evidence-based treatment will be helpful but is not required.

Registration and Fees
Professionals – $100 ($120 at door)
Students – $50 ($60 at door)
Fees are refundable until June 15th less a $25 charge

About the Presenter
Dr. Elyssa Kushner is a clinical psychologist at the Philadelphia VA Medical Center. Dr. Kushner received training in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy at the Anxiety and Agoraphobia Treatment Center, at the Montefiore Medical Center of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine and at the Center for the Treatment and Study of Anxiety at the University of Pennsylvania where she served as a clinician, clinical supervisor, study coordinator and consultant on studies, lectures, and training related to OCD and PTSD. At the Philadelphia VAMC, she works with veterans facing the challenges of PTSD, other anxiety disorders and depression. She continues to provide training, supervision and consultation at a variety of levels encouraging the provision of time-limited evidence-based treatments both inside and outside the national VA system. She has lectured about scrupulosity and some of the difficulties of integrating anxiety disorder treatment into the unique challenges of the religious community in various venues including continuing to lecture at the Center for the Treatment and Study of Anxiety for their OCD training workshops as well as at universities. She continues to treat patients from the Orthodox community through her private practice and provide consultation services to other treatment providers within the Orthodox community.

Recommended readings: