Functional Assessment of the Problem

Examples of closed-end or menu-type questions the behavioral health consultant (BHC) might ask in each category, using depression as the example.

1. Nature of the referral problem (the first question to ask after the introduction)

   **BHC:** Dr. Smith would like me to assist the two of you to better manage your depressed mood. Is depressed mood what you see as the main problem or is it something different?

   **Patient:** Yes, its depression.

2. Duration

   **BHC:** Is feeling depressed something that has been going on for the past 2 or 3 weeks or has it been longer or shorter than that?

   About how long ago was it that you first noticed you were feeling depressed?

   How many months or weeks ago did you start to notice you were getting more depressed?

3. Triggering events

   **BHC:** Was there anything different going on in your life or anything that happened to trigger your depressed mood or did it just seem to come out of the blue?

4. Frequency and intensity of the problem

   **BHC:** How many times a day, week, or month would you say you feel depressed?

   On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being not depressed at all and 10 being the most depressed you’ve ever felt in your life, what was your average level of depression over the past 2 weeks?

5. Factors associated with the problem getting better or worse

   - **Physical** (what is going on in the person’s body): sleep, pain, blood pressure, blood glucose, etc.
   - **Emotional** (how they feel): sad, happy, angry, worried, anxious, depressed, frustrated, stressed, etc.
   - **Behavioral** (what do they do or not do): too much or too little activity, saying or not saying things, etc.
   - **Environmental/Social** (place, time of day, friends, family, coworkers): afternoon, when boss is there, etc.
   - **Cognitive** (thoughts): what are they thinking in association with symptoms and/or poor functioning?

   **BHC:** Is there anything that you do or anything that happens that helps you feel less depressed?

   Is there anything that you do or anything that happens that leads you to feel more depressed?

6. Functional impairment
- Changes in work performance
  
  **BHC:** Have you noticed any changes in your ability to do your job as your depressed mood has gotten worse?

- Changes in work, friend, or social relationships
  
  **BHC:** Have you noticed changes in your work relationships, as your depression has gotten worse? Were there any changes in friend or social relationships just before or around the time your difficulties started?

- Changes in significant familial relationships (spouse, children, etc.)
  
  **BHC:** Were there any changes in family relationships just prior to or around the time your difficulties started? Since you started getting depressed, has there been an impact on your relationships with your (spouse, children, friends)?

  **Patient:** Yes, with my wife.

  **BHC:** What seems to be the biggest problem with your wife since you’ve been more depressed?

- Changes in social activities (going out with friends, church, etc.).
  
  **BHC:** Often people will decrease or stop their social activities when depressed. Has that happened to you?

  **Patient:** Yes.

  **BHC:** What have you cut back on or stopped?

  **Patient:** Going to church and going to dinner with my wife.

  **BHC:** How often did you used to go to church and go out to dinner with your wife?

- Changes in fun/recreational/relaxing/meaningful activities
  
  **BHC:** Sometimes when people get depressed they cut back or stop meaningful or enjoyable activities. Have you cut back or stopped enjoyable or meaningful activities?

  **Patient:** Yes.

  **BHC:** What have you cut back on or stopped?

  **Patient:** Playing with the kids.

  **BHC:** How often did you used to play with the kids?

- Change in exercise.
  
  **BHC:** Do you exercise now?

  **Patient:** No.

  **BHC:** Have you exercised in the past?

  **Patient:** Yes.

  **BHC:** Have you stopped since you started feeling depressed?

  **Patient:** Yes.

  **BHC:** What did you used to do and how many days a week did you do it? When you were exercising before, what benefits did you get from it?

7. Changes in sleep, energy, concentration, appetite

  **BHC:** Are you sleeping about the same, more, or less than before you started getting depressed?

  **Patient:** Less.
BHC: Are you having trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or both?
Patient: Both.

BHC: Over the past 2 weeks, on average, how long does it take you to fall asleep?
Patient: 2 hours.

BHC: Over the past 2 weeks, on average, how many times do you wake up at night?
Patient: Three.

BHC: About how long does it take you to fall back to sleep?
Patient: 45 minutes.

BHC: Have you noticed a decrease in energy?
Have your ability to concentrate decreased?
Have you seen any increase or decrease in your appetite or is it about the same as usual?
Have you lost or gained any weight since you started getting depressed?

8. Caffeine use
BHC: Do you drink caffeinated drinks?
Patient: Yes.

BHC: What kind: tea, coffee, soda?
Patient: Coffee.

BHC: How many in a typical day?
Patient: Two.

BHC: How many ounces in each drink?
Patient: Twelve.

9. Alcohol use
BHC: Do you drink alcoholic drinks?
Patient: Yes.

BHC: What kind: beer, wine, mixed drinks?
Patient: Beer.

BHC: How many in a typical day, week, or month?
Patient: Three a day.

BHC: How many ounces in each drink?
Patient: 24.

10. Medications or supplements
BHC: Are you taking any prescribed or over-the-counter medications or supplements?
Patient: Yes.

BHC: What are you taking, how much are you taking, and what are you taking it for?

11. Mood over past 2 weeks
BHC: Over the past 2 weeks would you describe your mood as down, sad, depressed, anxious, angry, frustrated, something different, or is it a combination of things?
Patient: Sad and anxious.

BHC: How many days a week would you say you feel sad and anxious?
Patient: Six.

BHC: On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being not being anxious or depressed at all and 10
being the most anxious and depressed you’ve ever felt in your life, what would you say your average level of anxiety and depression has been over the past 2 weeks?

Patient: Five.

12. Suicide or homicide risk (These questions will likely not be asked as a routine part of your assessment but should be asked when you deem it clinically relevant, for instance in assessing depressed mood.)

BHC: Do you have thoughts of harming or killing yourself?
Have you ever tried to kill yourself?
Do you have thoughts of harming or killing anyone else?
Have you ever tired to harm or kill anyone?

13. Open-ended questions

BHC: Is there anything I haven’t asked you about that you think is important for me to know?
[If time allows.] Take me through what a typical weekday is like for you from the time you get up to the time you go to bed.
Take me through what you typically do on the days you’re not working, or on the weekend.