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Case Planning in Tinnitus Management

Comprehensive Case and Safety Planning in Tinnitus Management: A Multimodal Approach for Audiologists

Mark Partain, AuD



Mark Partain, AuD

- Mark Partain, AuD, is an audiologist and tinnitus management specialist with over two decades of personal experience living with tinnitus. Mark earned his Doctor of Audiology degree from Rush University and has built his expertise through clinical roles at North Shore Audio-Vestibular Lab outside Chicago, IL and at Treble Health. As the founder of MPTinnitus, he brings an empathetic and personalized approach to tinnitus care, integrating evidence-based audiological practices, psychological strategies, and mindfulness techniques. Mark is also the author of *Quieting the Storm: A Guide to Tinnitus Management*, a patient-focused book offering practical strategies and supportive insights for people living with tinnitus.

Disclosures

- **Presenter Disclosure:** Mark Partain: Financial: Mark Partain AuD is employed by MPTinnitus in Carmel IN, and Indiana University Health. He received an honorarium for presenting this course. Non-financial: Mark Partain has no relevant non-financial relationships to disclose.
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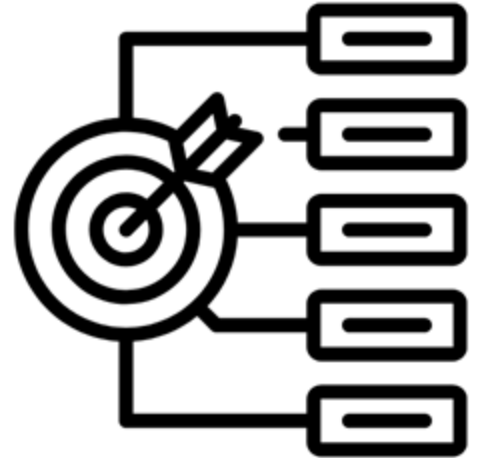
Limitations/Risks

- The applicability and accuracy of the course content may vary according to the clinical, geographical, and cultural contexts of participants; providers should adapt the presented information accordingly.
- Healthcare, particularly tinnitus management, is rapidly evolving. New research findings may influence the validity of the information presented in this course. Providers should regularly consult the latest research, evidence-based guidelines, and recommendations from professional audiology and healthcare associations.
- Interventions discussed in this course, including multimodal approaches and safety planning, may have varying generalizability; practitioners must always consider individual patient needs, clinical settings, and population-specific factors.
- This course does not cover all potential risk factors, diagnostic tools, therapeutic methods, or interventions for tinnitus management. Complex clinical cases may necessitate individualized approaches and additional considerations.
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- Providers should evaluate the limitations and ethical implications associated with diagnostic and screening tools discussed within this course, particularly considering their potential for false-positive or false-negative outcomes.
- It is the responsibility of participants to critically evaluate evidence presented in this course and from multiple external sources, using professional judgment to appropriately integrate new information into clinical practice.

Learning Outcomes

After this course, participants will be able to:

- Explain how to create individualized tinnitus management plans by completing comprehensive case formulation worksheets.
- Discuss how to effectively communicate realistic management options and set clear treatment expectations during patient consultations.
- Describe how to develop and implement proactive safety plans to reduce patient distress and manage tinnitus-related emotional crises.



Why Comprehensive Case Planning Matters

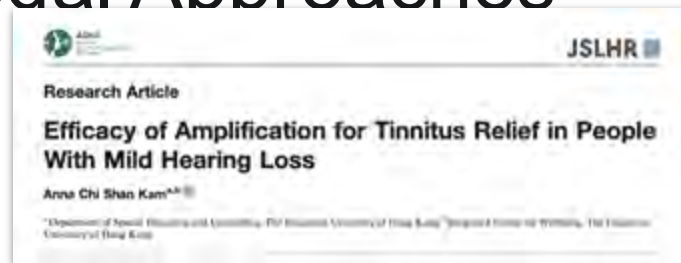
- **Resist the urge** to jump directly into immediate tinnitus treatments.
- Comprehensive planning establishes clear, **realistic expectations** and enhances patient-clinician collaboration.
- A thorough initial discussion builds trust and increases patient comfort and confidence in the treatment process.
- Clearly defined **treatment goals** improve **long-term outcomes** and **patient satisfaction**.

Limitations of Sound Therapy Alone

- Sound therapy is an **effective audiologic tool** but has inherent limitations.
 - Tinnitus distress involves more than auditory perception, it significantly impacts **emotional and psychological well-being**.
 - Relying solely on sound therapy risks leaving critical components of tinnitus distress unaddressed.
 - Research supports a more **comprehensive approach**, integrating psychological and emotional management strategies alongside traditional sound therapy.
- 

Evidence Supporting Multimodal Approaches

- Research consistently demonstrate that **combining audiologic and psychological interventions** enhances tinnitus management outcomes.
 - **Kam (2023) A, 1b:** Amplification plus counseling significantly reduced tinnitus severity compared to counseling alone.
 - **Lu et al. (2022) A, 1a:** Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, paired with audiologic management, showed superior outcomes over single-modality treatment.



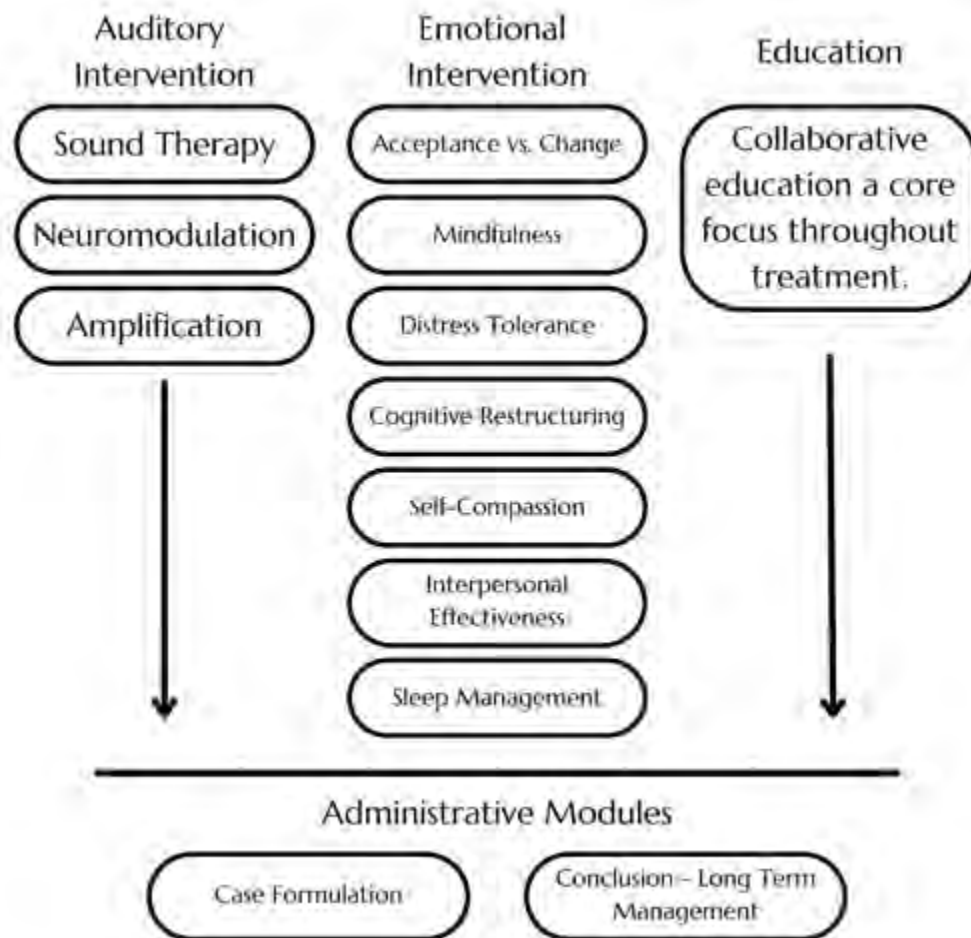
Evidence Supporting Multimodal Approaches

- **Liu et al. (2021) A, 1a:** Sound therapy with educational consultation consistently outperformed sound therapy alone.
- Integrating approaches leads to:
 - Improved emotional regulation and coping.
 - Increased treatment adherence and engagement.
 - Enhanced quality of life outcomes.



Developing Your Own Protocol

- An effective tinnitus management protocol should align with your **comfort level and clinical expertise**.
- Clearly define your **scope of practice**:
 - What interventions will you routinely include?
 - Which approaches are beyond your scope or require referral to other professionals?
- Your protocol should address:
 - **Auditory components** (e.g., sound **therapy, amplification**)
 - Psychological and emotional components (e.g., counseling, coping strategies, stress management)
- Personalizing your approach:
 - Increases your **clinical confidence and effectiveness**
 - Enhances **patient clarity and treatment buy-in**
 - Improves **overall treatment outcomes**



Biopsychosocial Model Overview

- Tinnitus distress involves multiple interacting components:
 - **Biological Factors:**
 - Auditory perception (e.g., pitch, loudness)
 - Hearing loss and auditory system changes
 - Sleep disruption and physical health
 - **Psychological Factors:**
 - Emotional reactions (e.g., anxiety, depression)
 - Cognitive processes (e.g., attention, catastrophizing)
 - Coping strategies and resilience
 - **Social Factors:**
 - Interpersonal relationships and support networks
 - Work-related stressors and productivity impacts
 - Social isolation or avoidance behaviors



Biopsychosocial Worksheet

This worksheet helps to categorize tinnitus-related symptoms and experiences into biological, psychological, and social factors. By understanding tinnitus through a biopsychosocial lens, patients can identify multiple contributors to their distress and develop a more comprehensive management plan.

- **Clinical Utility of the Worksheet:**

- Provides a structured, standardized approach to clinical assessment
- Facilitates patient understanding of complex tinnitus distress factors
- Enhances clarity in treatment planning discussions
- Creates collaborative dialogue between patient and clinician
- Supports clear rationale for chosen treatment modules

Biological Factors: What physical or medical aspects contribute to your tinnitus experience?	Psychological Factors: What thoughts, emotions, or mental health factors influence your tinnitus distress?	Social Factors: What social or environmental factors impact your tinnitus experience?

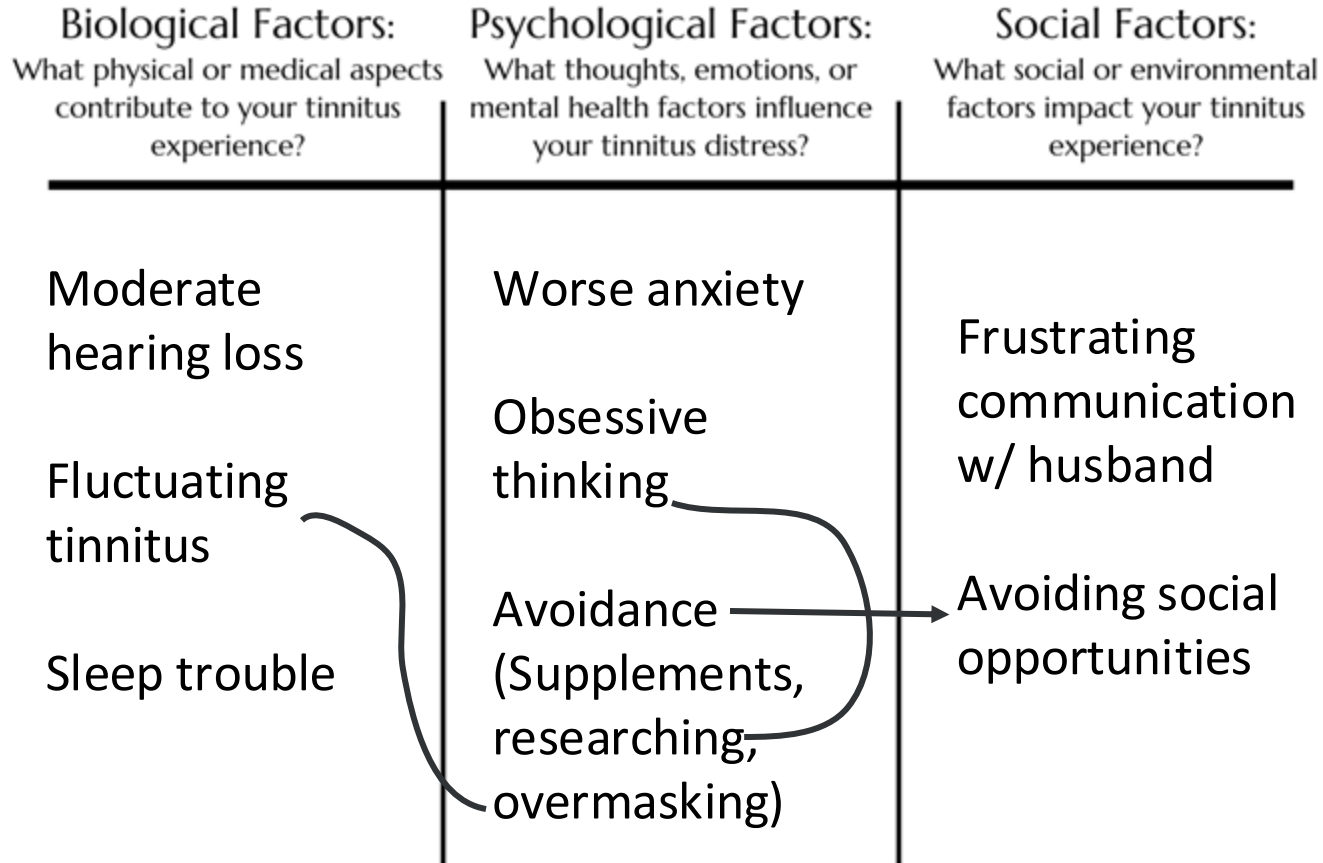
Notes and Reflections:

Biopsychosocial Worksheet

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Biological Factors: What physical or medical aspects contribute to your tinnitus experience?	Psychological Factors: What thoughts, emotions, or mental health factors influence your tinnitus distress?	Social Factors: What social or environmental factors impact your tinnitus experience?
Moderate hearing loss	Worse anxiety	Frustrating communication w/ husband
Fluctuating tinnitus	Obsessive thinking	Avoiding social opportunities
Sleep trouble	Avoidance (Supplements, researching, overmasking)	



Case Planning Worksheet: Purpose and Function

- **What is the Case Planning Worksheet?**
 - A structured tool listing available tinnitus intervention modules.
 - Provides space to record notes on each module's relevance to an individual patient.
- **Why Use This Worksheet?**
 - Clearly organizes and documents clinical decisions.
 - Facilitates detailed and transparent discussions with patients.
 - Helps identify patient priorities, treatment goals, and individual needs.
- **Enhancing Collaboration:**
 - Encourages patient participation in selecting treatment modules.
 - Clarifies rationale behind incorporating (or excluding) specific interventions.
 - Supports shared decision-making, increasing patient satisfaction and adherence.
- **How it Improves Treatment Outcomes:**
 - Systematic planning leads to targeted and individualized care.
 - Clearly communicated plans help patients feel heard and engaged.
 - Establishes accountability and clear expectations from the start of treatment.

Case Formulation

This worksheet helps clinicians and patients map out individual tinnitus profiles by identifying key stressors and management targets. It also provides space to link treatment modules to patient needs and encourage patient engagement.

What specific aspects of tinnitus distress do you want to improve?

What situations, environments, or emotions increase tinnitus-related stress?

Notes:

- ☐ - Sound Therapy
- ☐ - Acceptance vs. Change
- ☐ - Mindfulness
- ☐ - Distress Tolerance
- ☐ - Cognitive Reframing
- ☐ - Self-Compassion & Validation
- ☐ - Interpersonal Effectiveness
- ☐ - Sleep Management

- Patient Case Example:

- Patient:
 - 54-year-old female
 - Tinnitus duration: 3 years
- Chief Complaints:
 - Sleep disruption
 - anxiety related to tinnitus worsening
 - moderate hearing loss
- Additional Notes:
 - No significant interpersonal issues, but struggles with negative thinking patterns about tinnitus; previous use of masking devices not consistently helpful

What specific aspects of tinnitus distress do you want to improve?

Fluctuations

(sometimes tied to emotion/anxiety)

Sleep

Overall control

Snowballing thoughts

- ☐ - Sound Therapy
- ☒ - Acceptance vs. Change
- ☒ - Mindfulness
- ☐ - Distress Tolerance
- ☐ - Cognitive Reframing
- ☒ - Self-Compassion & Validation
- ☒ - Interpersonal Effectiveness
- ☒ - Sleep Management

What situations, environments, or emotions increase tinnitus-related stress?

Tinnitus feels louder in evenings.

Fluctuations ^(spikes) get in the way of life

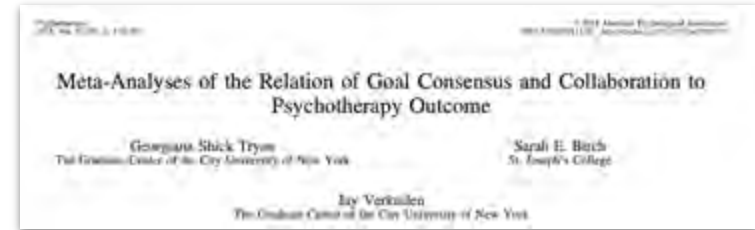
Notes:

‘Feels like I’m failing at this.’

‘When I sleep well, my tinnitus is better.’

The First Appointment Matters

- The initial appointment is crucial for establishing a strong therapeutic alliance, significantly impacting patient outcomes.
- **Tryon et al., 2018, (A, 1a).**
 - Goal consensus (client and therapist agreement on therapy goals) was strongly correlated with positive psychotherapy outcomes.
 - Collaboration (the degree to which therapist and client actively work together) was also significantly correlated with positive outcomes.
- **Del Río Olvera et al., 2022 (B, 2b).**
 - Therapeutic alliance ratings after the first session were positively and significantly associated with later client adherence and treatment outcomes.
 - Specifically, therapeutic alliance established during the initial session explained **32% of the variance in overall treatment outcomes** measured at follow-up.



Safety Planning in Tinnitus Management

- **Why Safety Planning?**

- Research shows that patients with tinnitus have significantly higher rates of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts compared to the general population (**Seo et al., 2016**) C, 4.
- Open, proactive discussions about safety can significantly reduce risk and distress (**Stanley et al., 2018**) B, 2b.

- **Elevated Risks in Tinnitus Patients:**

- Suicidal Ideation: Approximately twice as common as in non-tinnitus individuals.
- Suicide Attempts: Significantly higher prevalence among patients experiencing severe tinnitus distress.

- **Clinician Comfort and Confidence:**

- Safety discussions can be challenging or uncomfortable for audiologists.
- Importance of structured safety planning to guide difficult conversations and enhance clinician comfort.



Safety Planning in Tinnitus Management

- **Goals of Safety Planning:**
 - Reduce immediate risk through clearly outlined proactive steps.
 - Foster patient empowerment by establishing clear pathways for help-seeking behaviors.
 - Build therapeutic alliance
- **Clarify roles:**
 - Audiologists provide initial assessment and resources but emphasize appropriate referrals to mental health professionals or emergency care as needed.



Research Supporting Safety Planning Protocols

- **Effectiveness of Structured Safety Planning:**
 - **Stanley et al. (2018) B, 2b** conducted a large-scale study (Safety Planning Intervention Plus, SPI+) in emergency departments, finding **approximately 50% fewer suicidal behaviors in patients receiving structured safety planning** and brief follow-up interventions compared to usual care.
- **Key Elements of Successful Safety Protocols:**
 - Clearly outlined **steps for managing crisis** moments.
 - Defined methods for distraction, social support, and crisis contacts.
 - Structured follow-up calls post-intervention reinforce use and effectiveness.
- **Clinical Implications:**
 - Safety planning significantly reduces suicidal behaviors, making it an essential practice for audiologists managing patients with severe tinnitus distress.
 - Encourages proactive clinician-patient communication on sensitive topics.
- **Supporting Data:**
 - SPI+ intervention led to more than double the likelihood of patients attending subsequent mental health appointments, **reinforcing patient safety and improved clinical outcomes.**

Defining Professional Roles in Safety Planning

- **Audiologist's Role:**
 - **Recognize** signs of severe emotional distress related to tinnitus.
 - Initiate and facilitate discussions about safety.
 - Provide **resources and referrals** to mental health professionals.
- **Mental Health Professional's Role:**
 - **Provide therapeutic interventions** for emotional distress, anxiety, and depression.
 - Conduct in-depth psychological assessments and treatment.
 - **Offer crisis intervention** and ongoing psychological support.
- **Emergency Personnel's Role:**
 - Immediate response to **acute crises and suicidal emergencies**.
 - Provide rapid stabilization and hospitalization if needed.
 - Connect patient with emergency mental health services.
- **Importance of Clear Boundaries:**
 - Protect patient safety and clinician integrity.
 - Ensure rapid and appropriate response during crisis.
 - Maintain effective interdisciplinary communication.

Comfortably Addressing Patient Safety

- **Why It Matters:**
 - Patients experiencing tinnitus-related distress have elevated suicide risk **Seo et al. (2016)**.
 - Clear communication establishes **trust** and promotes **safety**.
- **Effective Strategies for Initiating Conversations:**
 - **Normalize the conversation:**
 - “Sometimes tinnitus can be really overwhelming emotionally. It’s common to feel anxious or distressed. I want us to be able to talk openly about how you’re feeling and how we can keep you safe.”
 - **Clarify professional roles and set boundaries clearly:**
 - “My role as your audiologist includes supporting you in managing tinnitus, but I’m not trained to provide mental health counseling. If you feel overwhelmed or unsafe, it’s crucial to reach out to your mental health provider or emergency services.”
 - **Offer supportive direction proactively:**
 - “If you ever feel like things are too much to handle or have thoughts about harming yourself, please reach out immediately to someone qualified to help. Your therapist, a crisis hotline, or the emergency department.”

Practical Demonstration: Using the Safety Plan Worksheet

Tinnitus Safety Plan

This safety plan helps individuals experiencing high tinnitus-related distress identify coping strategies, support systems, and crisis resources. By creating a structured plan, patients can proactively manage distress and reduce impulsive, reactive responses.

Step 1: Recognizing Warning Signs
What situations, thoughts, or feelings indicate that your distress is escalating?

Step 2: Coping Skills & Distractions
What can you do to manage distress in the moment?

Step 3: Safe Social Settings
Where can you go to feel supported or distracted?

From A Multimodal Protocol for Tinnitus Management by Mark Parish, AuD

Tinnitus Safety Plan

Step 4: Supportive People
Who are the people you trust to talk to when feeling overwhelmed?

Step 5: Professional Support
Who would you contact during a crisis or when distress becomes unmanageable?

Step 6: Reasons for Living & Hopeful Reminders
What keeps you motivated to keep going? Who or what do you care about most?

Emergency Contacts:
List emergency contacts and crisis resources.

- Crisis Hotline: _____
- Mental Health Support: _____
- Trusted Friend/Family Member: _____

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Practical Demonstration: Using the Safety Plan Worksheet

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Step 1: Recognizing Warning Signs

What situations, thoughts, or feelings indicate that your distress is escalating?

Feeling of tinnitus getting louder at night.
Several nights of bad/no sleep
Feeling like no one understands what it's like

Step 2: Coping Skills & Distractions

What can you do to manage distress in the moment?

Take prescribed sleeping med
Call best friend
(use sound therapy)

Step 3: Safe Social Settings

Where can you go to feel supported or distracted?

Watch my favorite TV show
Book store book club
Ask husband for support

Practical Demonstration: Using the Safety Plan Worksheet

Tinnitus Safety Plan

Step 4: Supportive People

Who are the people you trust to talk to when feeling overwhelmed?

Husband, best friend, mom, daughter
Jean at the bookstore

Step 5: Professional Support

Who would you contact during a crisis or when distress becomes unmanageable?

Therapist
Crisis line
Go to hospital (Best friend knows to encourage)

Step 6: Reasons for Living & Hopeful Reminders

What keeps you motivated to keep going? Who or what do you care about most?

It has already gotten better!
(One night of good sleep does wonders)
Getting back to the things I love.
(music, reading, family)

Emergency Contacts:

List emergency contacts and crisis resources.

- Crisis Hotline: 988/91
- Mental Health Support: 1 Therapist - 234-776-2323
- Trusted Friend/Family Member: Best Friend - 234-775-2297

Summary & Key Takeaways

- **Comprehensive Case Planning is Essential:**
 - Establishes clear expectations
 - Enhances patient-clinician collaboration
 - Leads to more effective and personalized tinnitus management
- **Multimodal Approaches Improve Outcomes:**
 - Sound therapy alone is often insufficient
 - Incorporating psychological and emotional strategies reduces tinnitus distress
 - Research strongly supports multimodal interventions
- **Safety Planning is Critical and Effective:**
 - Elevated suicide risk among tinnitus patients underscores need for proactive safety discussions
 - Structured safety plans significantly reduce risk
- **Clear Communication is Crucial:**
 - Openly addressing emotional distress and safety helps build trust
 - Clearly defining professional roles ensures appropriate referrals and patient safety

Q&A



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