

THERAPY: On the couch

SHRINKING SECOND LIFE

By VALENTINO SCHNABEL

HOW ONE PIONEERING CYBERPSYCHOLOGIST IS BRINGING HIS EXPERTISE TO SL

AVATARS may have no need for doctors but one psychologist is helping many residents in SL.

Craig Kamenev started his Centre for Positive Mental Health in April 2006 to provide information on mental health, before stating avatar-based online psychotherapy three months later.

He says SL offers the chance to reach people who would otherwise have limited access to mental health services due to geographical isolation, physical disabilities or agoraphobia. "These groups of people are often unable to seek out traditional mental health services. "I find that a great many people with these conditions use SL as a consistent method for

social interaction."

Craig handles several SL clients for one-to-one therapy at a cost of L\$27,000 (around US\$90) per session – a significant discount from RL.

He added: "Clients bring a great deal of information regarding their personality in the form of their avatar design, name choice and props." Sessions will be conducted at first via chat or IMs, with the option to switch to Skype or video as they progress.

"While I find the pace is a little slower than in my RL therapy sessions, it tends to run more

efficiently and to the point than in RL. Due to the need to organize thoughts for typing, and the anonymity of the situation, clients usually work quicker than in RL therapy sessions."

Like any psychotherapy, treatment in SL can be hard work. "One of my clients once asked in a joking manner, 'If therapy is supposed to make me feel better, why is it that I often cry during our sessions?'

"An additional benefit of SL sessions is that clients tend to feel less self-conscious than in RL. This often allows them to share details of their concerns much earlier in the sessions than my RL clients."



CRAIG KAMENEV