

Family Therapy During Chronic Illness

Coping with a chronic illness can cause reactions and feelings in the patient which are in the range of the normal, such as anger, fear, depression, and grief. The illness changes the patient's life. Patients are no longer independent, but have to cope with dependence and loss of abilities, hopes, and plans. The patient lives with doubt, uncertainty, and frustration. In addition, patients sometimes feel that no one understands what they are experiencing, and that they are isolated from the people with whom they once had daily contact.

A chronic illness can complicate family communication, for several reasons:

1. Keeping the illness a secret—in order to “protect” the rest of the family. Family members notice that something is happening, but the situation is unclear.
2. Understanding the significance of the illness—sometimes, family members do not understand the significance of the illness and its consequences for daily life. The family tries to help by offering advice that is not always appropriate for the new situation, thus aggravating the patient.
3. Change in roles—the patient can no longer fulfill the roles performed in the past, and other family members must take on new, additional roles.
4. Daily help—the family member needs help in daily activities.
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For family members, these situations are challenging, both practically and emotionally. They must cope with far-reaching changes and the loss of hopes. Like the patient, they may experience feelings of helplessness, frustration, tiredness, guilt feelings, and sometimes resentment. Such feelings are normal, but if family members do not communicate or relate to the changes, the situation can deteriorate and relationships can become strained.

Short-term family therapy gives legitimization to the difficult feelings that everyone holds. It enables family members to discuss things openly, to share the burden, and to find efficient solutions. In addition, it assists the family in limiting the illness' negative impact on the life of the patient, and encourages family members to direct their attention to the positive aspects of the family ties, so that they can continue enjoying their shared life. It strengthens the feeling of togetherness and the family's shared identity.

Through its work in the various hospital departments, our staff is exposed daily to such situations. We are experienced in supporting the patient and the family. We are aware of the challenges that the patient and the family face, and know just how much good communication within the family is good for everyone. Even families that had good relationships before the onset of the illness have difficulty adjusting to the new reality. We offer you short-term family therapy that will help the family to function in the new situation.