


Emotional Challenges of Chronic Illness

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A stylized silhouette of a mountain range in shades of teal, located in the bottom right corner of the slide.

Emotional Challenges

- ◆ What are they?
 - What are you *really* feeling?
- ◆ What are the associated behaviors?
- ◆ What is normal?
- ◆ What is disorder?

Psychiatric Perspective

◆ Psychiatrist

- Medical doctor specializing in the brain
- Emotions, behaviors and thinking
- Scientific inquiry, journals, national and international meetings, governing boards
- Different areas of psychiatry

◆ Psychosomatic Medicine

- Mental health care for people with medical illness

Illness

- ◆ Disease is the biological process
- ◆ Illness is the whole experience
 - Unique to the individual
- ◆ Severity of illness or type does **not** predict an individual's response
- ◆ Impact of life events

Illness

- ◆ Initial shock
 - Unconscious vision of invulnerability
- ◆ Tremendous variety in responses
 - Unique for each person
 - Multiple factors

Illness

- ◆ Separation
- ◆ "Am I a number?"
- ◆ Loss of control
- ◆ Loss of privacy
- ◆ Dependence on others

Illness

- ◆ Overwhelm coping strategies
- ◆ Usefulness depends on situation
- ◆ Strategy may need to change as situation changes


Emotional Reactions

- ◆ Worry
- ◆ Sadness
- ◆ Grief
- ◆ Frustration
- ◆ Anger
- ◆ Guilt

Emotional Reactions

- ◆ Shame
- ◆ Regret
- ◆ Fear
 - Catastrophic fears
- ◆ Hopelessness

Disguised emotions?

- ◆ Mind tries to protect you
 - ◆ You may not even be aware it is happening
 - ◆ There may be underlying emotions
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Mind at work

- ◆ Suppression
- ◆ Humor
- ◆ Altruism
- ◆ Intellectualization
- ◆ Displacement
- ◆ Idealization

Mind at work

◆ Denial

- Refusal to acknowledge painful realities
- Does it help?
- What is the emotion provoking it?
- Are other people supporting it?

Coping

- ◆ Ways of thinking or behaving to manage a problem and deal with emotions
- ◆ Coping strategies are in place long before illness

Adaptive Coping

- ◆ Learning about the problem
- ◆ Accepting responsibility
 - Requesting support and reassurance
- ◆ Problem solving
 - Setting concrete, limited goals
- ◆ Rehearsing alternative outcomes
- ◆ Acceptance
 - Finding meaning

Healthy Responses

- ◆ Take care of yourself
 - diet, sleep, exercise
- ◆ Education yourself
- ◆ Get involved
 - volunteer, advocate, work
- ◆ Reconsider life priorities

“Good Copers”

- ◆ Flexible
- ◆ Resourceful
- ◆ Optimistic
- ◆ Practical
 - Identify pressure points and problem solve

Maladaptive Coping

- ◆ Rejecting reasonable treatment
- ◆ Doing something impractical and reckless
 - Alcohol and drugs
- ◆ Blaming yourself
- ◆ Social withdrawal
- ◆ Unyielding denial

Rejecting treatment

- ◆ Reminder of being sick
- ◆ To feel more in control
- ◆ Anger
- ◆ Fear
- ◆ Cost
- ◆ Transportation
- ◆ Work and child care schedules
- ◆ Lack of information

Where did coping style come from?

- ◆ Personality traits
- ◆ How is illness viewed?
- ◆ Life stresses
 - Income, job, time, family, care giving

Personality Traits

- ◆ Individual characteristics are heightened or magnified during illness
- ◆ Dependent
 - unable to solve problems, asks for help a lot
- ◆ Controlling
 - orderly
- ◆ Dramatic
 - entertaining, loud, attention seeking

Personality Traits

- ◆ Paranoid
 - distrustful, quick to blame, sensitive
- ◆ Self involved
 - demanding, vain, arrogant
- ◆ Loners
 - aloof, awkward

How is illness viewed?

- ◆ *Challenge*
- ◆ Punishment
- ◆ Failure
- ◆ Irreparable loss or damage
- ◆ Emotional reaction and coping strategy are influenced by how you think about illness

Psychological Goals

- ◆ Reasonable emotional balance
- ◆ Preserve satisfactory self image
 - relationships
- ◆ Cope with uncertainty
- ◆ Manage
 - financial concerns
 - health care system
 - productivity

Mental Health Disorder

- ◆ Medical illness that deserves diagnosis and treatment
- ◆ Mental illness is common
- ◆ Not something to be embarrassed about
- ◆ Not a sign of weakness or a character flaw

Expected reactions

- ◆ Worry
 - Health, work, money, family
- ◆ Feeling unsettled and uncertain
- ◆ Feeling like things are out of your control
- ◆ Sad about disease and losses

Serious Red Flags

- ◆ Overpowering sense of doom
- ◆ So sad you can't go through treatment
- ◆ Difficulty making any decisions
- ◆ Can't sleep or eat
- ◆ Feeling worthless or hopeless
- ◆ Thoughts of harming yourself or others

Common Disorders

- ◆ Adjustment
- ◆ Generalized Anxiety
- ◆ Major Depression
- ◆ Alcohol Use

- ◆ Medical problems do *not* equal mental illness
 - No one “should” have a depressive disorder


Major Depressive Disorder

- ◆ Under diagnosed and under treated
- ◆ Lifetime risk
 - 10-25% women
 - 5-12% for men
- ◆ Serious brain based illness that can be life threatening
- ◆ There are treatments

What to do

- ◆ Speak up
 - Get clarity with what is happening
- ◆ Behavior changes
- ◆ Therapy
- ◆ Medications

Mental Health Professionals

- ◆ Primary doctor and nurse
 - ◆ Social workers
 - ◆ Psychologists (PhD)
 - ◆ Psychiatrists (MD)
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Psycho-education

- ◆ Reach out to family, friends, doctors, nurses, religious or spiritual people
- ◆ Websites – with caution
 - NIMH
 - NAMI
 - SAMHSA
- ◆ Keep a medical notebook
- ◆ Ask insurance company about behavioral health benefits

Behavior Changes

◆ *Sleep*

- Same times, bed for sleep only, cold/dark/quiet room, no alcohol or caffeine, no naps, no stress after dinner

◆ *Diet*

- fresh foods, regular meals, low sugar content

◆ *Exercise*

- scientifically proven to benefit mental health

Behavior Changes

- ◆ Stay present focused
- ◆ Relaxation
 - breathing, meditation, CDs
- ◆ Non-medical activities
- ◆ Limit substance use
 - alcohol, drugs, tobacco, caffeine

Psychotherapy

- ◆ Therapy is NOT
 - Mind reading
 - Always focused on your mother
- ◆ Different kinds
 - Length of time varies
 - Therapists are different
 - Insurance may cover some therapies

Psychotherapy

- ◆ Permission to express feelings
 - Will not make the disease worse
 - Treatment team will not abandon you
- ◆ Scientifically proven to treat anxiety and depression

Medications

- ◆ Know what you are treating
- ◆ Use medications only if helpful
- ◆ Avoid taking more than necessary
- ◆ Tell all doctors about all medications including **supplements or herbs** you are taking

Medications

- ◆ Tools to fight medical illness
- ◆ Scientifically proven to work
- ◆ Lots of options
 - may take time to find right one
 - take time to work
- ◆ No magic pills

Medications

- ◆ Anti-depressants
- ◆ Anti-anxiety
- ◆ Sleep aides
 - *Sleep hygiene*

- ◆ Medical evaluation
 - Side effects, drug interactions, medical problems

Conclusion

- ◆ Illness is a different experience for every person
- ◆ There is no one “right” way to go through illness
- ◆ Mental illness is a medical problem, ***NOT*** a failure to cope