

Psychotherapy

With the understanding of the neurosciences, the understanding of psychotherapy has increased. Virtually all patients with psychiatric disorders are now treated through the combined use of medication and psychotherapy to get the best results. This is supported through evidence based research.

The understanding that the aetiology of mental disorders is influenced by the environment has also led to the understanding of the treatment of mental disorders through changing the outside world. The interaction between the environment and the individual, including the understanding of the interactions between individuals, and the biological responses to these interactions, has integrated the scientific knowledge we have researched until now.

Treating people with the understanding that their disorders also have an influence on the environment guarantees a holistic approach.

Therapists who maintain the status quo of their patients have a lack of understanding about the real value of psychotherapy. Psychotherapy in essence, leads to systems change to empower patients to be able to take control of their lives again. The ultimate goal of most of the psychotherapies is to give the patient control over their symptoms and over their lives. The positive and negative feedback loops that have developed to stabilise the sick system makes way for the new more healthy balance to be established. It is worrying at times to note that psychiatrists often do not challenge problems either through a lack of knowledge and understanding or through choosing the easy way out.

Many modalities of psychotherapy have been described, with some having a large evidence data base and others only starting to be researched. It is essential that research in psychotherapy gets funded and supported as this will increase our understanding of psychotherapy and will ensure that we use the best and most appropriate psychotherapies for the different disorders. It is also important that psy-

chiatrists acquire skills in psychotherapy through practical learning and supervision.

Biological changes in the brain before and after psychotherapy have been well demonstrated. Through genetic transcription of genes to the changes in neuron plasticity and the changes in receptors and neurotransmitters, we have been able to increasingly understand the interactions in the biology between the environment and the different biological systems. This is also supported by the fact that no neurotransmitter in the brain functions on its own or is exclusively changed by medication on its own. If the concentration of a particular neurotransmitter is increased in one area of the brain, other neurotransmitters respond by either increasing or decreasing to balance the system, as would be the case in maintaining the homeostasis in other systems. An understanding and knowledge of these concepts are vital if we want to ensure that our patients get the best treatment available.

Our knowledge of learning has increased vastly over the last decade and research has unequivocally proven that through learning, our experiences and perceptions of the environment can lead to adaptive behaviours or “brain maps” that are at times totally inappropriate to solve problems and could in actual fact worsen the situation even leading to psychopathology. Psychotherapy has a particular value here to teach new skills and change the maps in our brains for us to act more appropriately.

Offering all patients with psychiatric disorders psychotherapy, is mandatory.

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