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*Pre and post interventional
psychological support to adults
with conHD: a single case study*

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Presentation overview

- Introduction
- Psychocardiology & role of the psychologist
- Case description - Gloria
- Initial sessions with Gloria & her husband John
- Psychological support course
- Conclusions



Introduction

- Previous quantitative investigation on pre-operational psychological status
- Role of psychologist in medical context
- Interesting prolonged case – opportunity also for psychotherapeutic intervention besides support



Psycho-cardiology

Molinari, Bellardita, & Compare, 2006

- Field of clinical psychology
- Psychology - prevention, treatment and rehabilitation in cardiac illnesses.
- A multidisciplinary approach - cardiac and psychological themes are not seen as being separate



Approaches in Psycho-Cardiology

Molinari et al., 2006

1. Carl Rogers' "patient focused therapy" – emotional support;
2. Positive psychology: focus on resources not only problematic aspects;
3. Cognitive behavioral therapy: relaxation techniques & medical compliance;
4. Systemic therapy: evaluation of the family – resource or additional stress?



The psychologist's role in the ACHD team (1) *Kovacs et al., 2005, 2006*

- Screening; Employing the 4 A's: Ask, Advise, Assist and Arrange referral
- Helping patients to initiate proactive discussions with the medical personnel;
- Coping with becoming aware of the condition or changes in cardiac-status;
- Accompanying the patient in the difficult paediatric-adult transitions;



|| The psychologist's role in the ACHD team (2) *Kovacs et al., 2005, 2006*

- Adjustment to cardiac devices and surgical preparation;
- Maximisation of adherence and behavioural modification;
- Dealing with anticipatory grief and mortality;
- Development of ACHD-specific measures and longitudinal psychosocial assessment.



Case description

- Gloria, 44 y. old, 2nd cardiac surgery – replacement of aortic valve.
- Congenital aortic valve insufficiency, ascending aortic aneurism & pulmonary atresia with interventricular defect.
- 1st cardiac surgery, 12y in Birmingham. Follow up of mild aortic valve insufficiency which progressively worsens – increasing tiredness.
- Referral by medical staff - great discomfort because of the draining pipes - longer period.



First meeting

- Fear of inadequate manifestation of suffering
- Social support & husband, encouragement, telling her not to complain and to try to be positive . Doing her best but not managing – discouragement.
- Rogersian empathy – space for description of suffering and invitation to be non judgemental towards oneself.



The husband's concerns...

- Her husband, John - concern about his wife's mental state.
- Systemic approach – intervention on partner and family:
 - Reassurance that mental state is not at all altered and that reactions are perfectly appropriate – no “appropriate reactions” for this situation!
 - Assertion of importance for suspension judgment and to try to be close to her, not with encouragement, but by listening and asking them what is required.



The scar and it's implications

- Great fear about her scar – inability to look at herself. Feedback and support to look at the scar in the mirror.
- Catharsis and memory of always feeling inadequate – difficulty to accept her condition when she was a little girl.
- Suggestion that the scar is the symbol of being ill and to further explore what it means for her to bear this condition and this sensation of inadequacy.



Difficulty at secondary school

- Feelings of inadequacy due to her physical limitations
 - shame comparison to classmates
- Problems with teachers:
 - Having to be accompanied by her mother to hikes
 - PA teacher excluding from activities – indelicacy
- Consequence - making herself invisible so as not to feel humiliated by the others.



The teacher's role

- Gloria's comparison of different PA teachers
- Inadequacy – not linked to condition but inappropriate adult/teacher behavior
- Crucial role of teachers attitude especially when it comes to PE



Working on the traumatic event

- Suggestion to re-experience event at school in the first person and in the present – catharsis
- Suggestion of imagining the same situation, but this time with her being as an adult.
- Desire to reply back to the teacher – reaffirmation of possibility to stand up for herself now



Conclusion of the sessions

- Differentiation between two different parts (vulnerable and adult) both being legitimate
- Increased awareness – link inadequacy & shame to past memories not previously shared
- Great benefit from support and psychological exploration



General conclusions

- Importance of psychological support during pre and post interventional period
- Essential to educate teachers in the handling of children with chronic conditions
- Important to consider under treatment in mental health in conHD

**Thank you for your
attention!**

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