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Physical/Mental illness and well-being, emotions and meaning: Re-conceptualizing the medical healing relationship model for holistic health and wellness

James E Smith

Washburn University, USA

By nature, humans are "sentient" beings translating emotional needs and desires through social interaction into ways of meeting those needs and desires. Human experience is physical and psychological, which includes emotions and meaning. An existential perspective of health care embraces how illness/health is conceptualized, experienced, what it "means": how it shapes the sense of self. Existential refers to existence, the specific mode of "being", such as illness/health. When illness occurs, people want to know why this is happening, what it means to their existence. Camus (1951) suggest "suffering" has to have meaning, "It is not the suffering of the child that is repugnant in itself, but the fact that the suffering is not justified. In the eyes of the rebel, what is missing from the misery of the world, as well as from its moment of happiness, is some principle by which they can be explained." Affliction must have meaning for healing and wholeness. It is this pursuit of meaning in one's life, directly influencing life, living, suffering, death, which is missing in the medical model. While the "medical" model heals the body, "restorative" holistic health care must be reframed to include emotions and meaning. An exploratory study found "cyclical patients" in physical therapy attributed some "meaning" to their illness. The results suggest the cyclical pattern presented in 33% of the participants has an emotional connection to their illness. The implications may be that the "medical model" is not enough to treat the psychological framework of health and meaning.

jim.smith@washburn.edu