

## Applications of Health Psychology: Modern Prospects

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One of the most essential and responsible approaches of medical specialists involve always being attentive and responsive to the updates and changes in their fields of activity. It is also the case of psychologists, as we will thereby refer to specialists of health psychology.

As medical experts are focused on perfecting their information and methods, so should health psychologists, in order to be able to compose a multidisciplinary team involved in the treatment of the patients who present conditions demanding a multifaceted case understanding. We dedicate the present editorial to health psychology as we consider it not only an issue of interest for specialist of health – whether general or mental health – but also a domain which should preoccupy social programs developed for the benefit of the community.

Health psychology, on a general level, is concerned with psychological factors involved in the state of illness or health and offering proper healthcare (Johnston & Kennedy, 1998), such as dysfunctional, stressful thoughts, comorbid types of personality or risk and protective behavior.

Special attention is given today to the idea of encouraging and developing health-supporting behavior. Ewart (1991) brings to discussion that the focus on such behavior is not only a personal issue or a subject of interest within the medical personnel – patient relationship, but also a subject of social interest, offering a context of constructing social programs applied in order to obtain general impact rather than impact on an individual level.

Ever since the 80's, authors such as Williams (1982), have brought to attention the active versus passive alternatives of behaving towards developing one's safety or vulnerability in facing illness or health risks; according to the mentioned author, health psychologists have been those specialists who have shown one's impact on their own health status, result mediated by different types of behavior.

We may assert that among the discussed types of behavior we may encounter the choice or capacity to embrace those which is protective towards our health, instead of embracing risk

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behaviors such as damaging habits, avoiding routine medical visits, lack of compliance towards the recommended treatment, etc.

We should consider that not only behavior plays a major role in generating negative or positive health outcomes, but also other specific psychological dimensions interfere with our health state, such as the cognitive level; authors such as Ajzen (1998) remind us about valuable research findings which support the determining role of self-efficacy as a major component of putting protective behaviors and self-regulation activity in action.

One other major applications of health psychology consists promoting health interventions within the population of patients suffering from disabilities and chronic illness; according to Ravesloot, Seekins & Young (1998), the mentioned group of patients confront not only the medical condition they have been diagnosed with, but also a set of secondary conditions which include, among other accuses, problematic psychosocial adjustment which may manifest through depression.

Regarding the contribution of health psychology in medical concerns, the supportive treatment of chronic illness might be one of the most important dimensions delivered by the discipline, dimension which deserves continuous attention from both medical and psychology specialists. In this matter, coping and adjustment to treatment are essential for the chronically diagnosed patient to be able to accept and adapt to the conditions imposed by the diagnosis he suffers of; extensive longitudinal analysis of psychological and adaptive factors involved in chronic illness outcomes are available (Stanton, Revenson, & Tennen, 2007) while the subject continues to be essential to the patient and requires attention from both medical and psychological personnel.

We should also take note of the impact health psychology has on improving the development of youngsters by publicly promoting health in schools (Matthews & Avis, 1982) but also in approaching modern health issues such as obesity (Bean, Stewart & Olbrisch, 2008), a critical condition in which, according to the authors, health psychologists play a major role both regarding proper assessment and treatment, as obesity is highly correlated to psychological comorbidities.

Other applications we may encounter within health psychology as a practical and research discipline are: supporting the study of individual factors such as gender and age upon health, the study of wellbeing and general state of health, the study of health psychology as conceptualization frame and treatment option for issues such as sleep disorders, obstetrics-related issues, frame of identifying suitable treatments of eating disorders and substance use (Caltabiano & Ricciardelli, 2012).

Regarding professional recommendations which we consider that should be noted by healthcare personnel, we will prioritize the following: encouraging the psychologists – both

experienced and freshmen – to give proper attention to the underlying emotional, cognitive and behavioral factors which cause and aggravate medical conditions; psychologists should also be able to promote lifestyles which support positive health outcomes, not only regarding mental health but also regarding the general state of health; at last, as far as the psychology specialists are concerned, it is recommended that they should develop a type of reasoning specific to the clinical field, in order to obtain a common field of terminology which can be shared with the medical staff they might come in contact with, thus establishing a constructive and effective type of communication for the best interest of the patient and reaching a multi-leveled treatment.

The idea of including psychology specialists within the multidisciplinary team of approaching clinical cases is also supported by other authors (Lorion & Jason, 1995), authors who also emphasize the utility of involving psychologists in the processes of clinical research and developing applicable and theoretical models regarding health-related issues.

On the other hand, health psychology can also be regarded as a subject of interest for medical personnel, as well. Therefore, it might be essential for the best outcome of the patient's evaluation, diagnosis and treatment to consider the potential psychological triggers of medical conditions, whether acute or chronic.

The psychological component, as research evidence shows (Nethercut & Piccione, 1984), may represent both a causal factor of medical conditions and a state which is capable of maintaining medical symptomatology. Authors such as Bishop (1994) support the idea of viewing clinical cases from the perspective of the result of a whole functioning system involving both the mind and the body in an equal proportion.

Therefore, we may add the important contribution which health psychology has brought to understanding several types of health conditions by including stress as a major factor of causing and developing such problems. The most important future direction which we may consider from this point of view is to encourage multidisciplinary research regarding a case approach involving both medical and psychological knowledge.

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