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Neuropsychotherapy: An integrated field of neuropsychological treatment

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Abstract

One of the essentials of holistic neuropsychological rehabilitation is psychotherapy together with cognitive retraining, family education and therapeutic assistance, supported work trials and the promotion of therapeutic community. Psychotherapy focuses on the patient's emotional and motivational status. It attempts to help the patient to adjust to altered functioning, to increase awareness and acceptance, and to facilitate renewed sense of identity, hope and meaning in life after brain injury. However, brain disorders often produce significant and disabling behavioral and emotional changes that cannot be adequately treated with conventional psychotherapy. Brain injuries also often result in cognitive difficulties that may make conventional psychotherapy unproductive.

Neuropsychotherapy is the use of neuropsychological knowledge in the psychotherapy of persons with brain injuries. The theoretical foundations of neuropsychotherapy include knowledge of brain-behavior relationships, the nature of neurological disorders and recovery, the theory of cognitive rehabilitation, and the theory of psychotherapy. Many theoretical approaches to psychotherapy are compatible with neuropsychotherapy. Appropriate techniques are chosen based on target problems, on therapists' abilities, and on clients' preferences and cognitive limitations. The emphasis of psychotherapy with brain injured patients is on psychoeducation, coping and adjustment.

Neuropsychotherapy is needed when the person with brain injury has significant emotional or behavioral problems resulting from that injury, and when the problems cannot be coped adequately in the setting of the person. Premorbid personality, emotional reactions to illness and organic changes in cognition, emotions and behavior contribute to the emotional state, behavior and personality of the injured person.

Therapeutic alliance, a collaborative working relationship with emotional bond, is a prerequisite in all treatment situations. The neuroscience aspects need to be included in building up the therapeutic alliance with brain injured patients to facilitate successful rehabilitative work. The therapist helps patients with healthy decision making and planning, guiding and regulating their behavior toward attainable goals while helping them to avoid catastrophic reactions.

Pioneering neuropsychotherapy training, a subspecialization for neuropsychologists, started in Finland in 2005. The Finnish Association of Neuropsychotherapy is organizing an international neuropsychotherapy workshop, Guidelines for Neuropsychotherapy on 19-22.9.2012 in Coiano, Tuscany.