

Can Disclosure of a Diagnosis
of Borderline Personality
Disorder Help Guide
Treatment for Clinicians,
Patients, and Families?

Workshop 17 May 18, 2009

Workshop Faculty

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Workshop Outline

- Disclosing the BPD Diagnosis: How Can It Help? **11:00 a.m. – 11:20 a.m.**
- Psychoeducation for Individuals with BPD and their Families **11:20 a.m. – 11:40 a.m.**
- The Connections Place: A Model for a Job Preparedness Program for Individuals with BPD **11:40 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**
- Audience Dialogue **12:00 p.m. – 12:30 p.m.**

Disclosing the BPD Diagnosis

- BPD is a common psychiatric disorder (1% - 2%) in the general population
- BPD is disproportionately represented in inpatient and outpatient psychiatric treatment settings
- BPD has potential to cause significant distress in the lives of patients and families
- The diagnosis of BPD is often withheld from patients

Disclosing BPD Diagnosis

- The diagnosis of BPD can be difficult to make
- Co-morbid diagnoses can complicate the accurate diagnosis of BPD
- Insufficient history can complicate the accurate diagnosis of BPD
- Clinicians may withhold the BPD diagnosis from patients *even* when accurately made

Disclosing the BPD Diagnosis

- Non-disclosure of serious illness, once common in medicine
- Disclosure now standard practice
- Almost universal disclosure in oncology
- Disclosure of schizophrenia diagnosis now widespread
- Reasons for disclosure: psychoeducation, reduction of stigma, encouraging autonomy

Disclosing the BPD Diagnosis

Why not disclose the BPD diagnosis?

- Questions about the validity of the BPD diagnosis
- Concern that the BPD diagnosis is stigmatizing
- Transference/Countertransference Paradigms

Disclosing BPD Diagnosis

Questions About the Validity of BPD

- Difficult to distinguish BPD from other diagnoses
- Diagnosis is invalid because of heterogeneity
- Frequent co-morbidity with other Axis I and Axis II diagnoses

Disclosing the BPD Diagnosis

- Higher yield for Axis II diagnoses in research settings
- Higher yield for Axis II diagnoses when clinicians use structured interviews in addition to standard clinical examinations
- Do clinicians *avoid* asking questions which would lead to a BPD diagnosis?

Disclosing the BPD Diagnosis

Stigma

- BPD symptoms can be frightening and frustrating for clinicians
- Clinicians can misuse the BPD diagnosis as a pejorative term for individuals provoking anger or dismay
- Other diagnoses with symptoms of suicidality or rage are not considered stigmatizing in the same way

Disclosing the BPD Diagnosis

Stigma

- Fear that the BPD diagnosis will engender hopelessness and despair
- Fear that the BPD diagnosis will communicate an “environmental” and not “biological” etiology
- Fear that the BPD diagnosis will communicate insensitivity to a trauma history

Disclosing the BPD Diagnosis

Transference/Countertransference

- Avoiding disclosure because of closeness and sympathy or hatred and fear
- Is it giving patients “the benefit of the doubt ?”
- Fear of rageful or self-destructive reactions:
Consistent with research?

Disclosing the BPD Diagnosis

Reasons to Disclose

- Patient autonomy
- Psychoeducation
- Accurate diagnosis can guide treatment
- Self-discovery of the diagnosis

Disclosing the BPD Diagnosis

Patient Autonomy

- Standard of care in medicine now
- Including patient in decision-making
- Respecting patients values
- Encouraging self-determination

Disclosing the BPD Diagnosis

Psychoeducation

- Relief with a name to the distress?
- Education about the diagnosis leading to empowerment and mastery
- New treatments and new research specific for individuals with BPD

Disclosing the BPD Diagnosis

Psychoeducation

- Revised thinking about stability of BPD given data from longitudinal studies?
- Emerging data from treatment studies: DBT, TFP, Mentalization-Based Treatment, STEPPS, Schema-Focused Therapy

Disclosing the BPD Diagnosis

Accurate Diagnosis Guides Treatment

- Clinician and patient's shared understanding of treatment options
- Realistic goals for pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy
- Referral to treatments specific for BPD

Disclosing the BPD Diagnosis

Self-Discovery of the Diagnosis

- Patients learning diagnosis from chart or insurance form
- Patients learning diagnosis from internet
- Patient learning diagnosis from referral to treatments for BPD (e.g., DBT, TFP, STEPPS)

Disclosing the BPD Diagnosis

- APA Guidelines recommend disclosure of BPD diagnosis
- Clinical practice suggests this is often not done
- Reasons are compelling for making discussion of the diagnosis part of treatment
- Public health implications of patients known to be high utilizers medical and psychiatric services unaware of their diagnosis

Questions for the Audience

- Do you routinely disclose a diagnosis of BPD?
- What are the risks and benefits of doing so?
- What experiences have you had, positive or negative, in sharing a BPD diagnosis with a patient?

Questions for the Audience

- How do you educate patients about BPD?
- How do you educate family members about BPD?
- What tools for psychoeducation about BPD have you used? What has been helpful?

Questions for the Audience

- What are your experiences helping individuals with BPD meet the challenges of work or school?
- How do you manage assessment of short and long-term disability with your patients with BPD?
- How have your patients with BPD fared in standard vocational rehabilitation programs?

Resources

- www.borderlinepersonalitydisorder.org
- www.theconnectionsplace.net