



Health psychology and health promotion

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Letter to Editor

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Dear Chief in Editor

Health psychology is define as studying psychological and behavioral processes in health, illness and healthcare. It contributes to the understanding of psychological, behavioral and cultural factors role in physical health and illness. Psychological factors can affect health directly. For example health is hurt by the chronically occurring environmental stressors which cumulatively affect the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal axis. On the other hand, a person's health is also interwoven with the behavioral factors. For instance, certain behaviors, including smoking and excessive alcohol consumption can, over time, harm health but exercise and diet low in saturated fat can enhance health. A biopsychosocial approach is becoming the cornerstone among the Health psychologists. According to health psychologists, health is the product of not only biological processes (e.g., a virus, tumor, etc.) but also the product of psychological (e.g., thoughts and beliefs), behavioral (e.g., habits) and social processes (e.g., socioeconomic status and ethnicity) [1].

As a specialty area, health psychology addresses how biology, psychology, behavior, and social factors influence health and illness. A wide variety of factors affect health and illness. Not only contagious and hereditary illness affect overall physical well-being and medical conditions, but also many behavioral and psychological factors can play a deteriorating role in this regard. The field of health psychology is focused on promoting health as well as preventing and treating the diseases and illness. Recent advances in psychological, medical and physiological research open a new window to look at health and illness. The biopsychosocial model beholds health and illness as the product of a combination of factors, including biological

characteristics (e.g., genetic predisposition), behavioral factors (e.g., lifestyle, stress, health beliefs) and social conditions (e.g., cultural influences, family relationships, social support). Stroke, heart disease, HIV/AIDS, cancer, birth defects and infant mortality, and infectious diseases are among illnesses that are related to psychological or behavioral factors. Health psychologists try to decrease these risk factors in order to improve overall

health and reduce illness. Current issues in health psychology involve: stress reduction, weight management, smoking cessation, daily nutrition improvement, risky sexual behaviors reduction, hospice care and grief counseling for terminal patients [2].

Psychologists attempting to understand how biological, behavioral and social factors affect health and illness are known as health psychologists. Health psychologists resort

to their psychology and health knowledge to promote general well-being and understand physical illness. They help people manage psychological and emotional aspects of their health and illness. To perform research and provide clinical assessments and treatment services, health psychologists cooperate with many different health care professionals such as physicians, dentists, nurses, physician's assistants, dietitians, social workers, pharmacists, physical and occupational therapists and chaplains. Many health psychologists focus on prevention and interventions to promote healthier lifestyles and find ways to encourage people to improve their health. For example, they may help people to lose weight or stop smoking. Health psychologists also use their skills to enhance the healthcare system by elucidating ways to doctors to communicate with their patients better [3].

Health psychology is a rapidly growing field. As numbers of people seek to take control of their own health increases, more and more people are following health-related information and resources. Health psychologists are trained to educate people about their own health and well-being and they do their best to fill the rising demand for counselling. Healthy psychology can benefit individuals in a variety of ways. Many professionals in this field give priority to prevention, including helping people maintain a healthy weight, avoid risky or unhealthy behaviors and maintain a positive outlook that can reduce stress, depression and anxiety. Due to famines and infectious and communicable diseases, epidemiologic transitions shift away from high infant mortality rate and deaths across all age groups toward morbidity and mortality due to chronic diseases that disproportionately affect the elderly and that are driven to a considerable extent by human behavior. Such transitions happen along with rising standards of living, improvements in sanitation and nutrition and modernization of medical and public health services. Health psychologists who remain focused on chronic illness can be proud of the many advances

in behavioral medicine research to which prevent has been contributed since the 1970s. However, we must consider this fact that the fundamental promise of our field remains mostly unfulfilled. Much like sanitation, vaccinations, and other advances of public health and modern medicine that were used against infectious and communicable diseases, when health psychology emerged as a new field and behavioral medicine was a very young science. It is firmly believed that behavioral and psychosocial interventions would help to eliminate chronic diseases. The researchers still hold that behavioral and psychosocial interventions can make a tremendous difference in health care; however, to fulfill the fundamental promise of our field, it will be necessary to produce much more convincing evidence that we have accumulated over the past four decades [4].

By developing and running programs, health psychologists try to help people to have a healthy life and to make changes in their lives such as stopping smoking, reducing the amount of alcohol they consume, eating more healthily and exercising regularly. Some illnesses can be more effectively treated if caught early. Health psychologists have made attempts to discover why some people do not seek early screenings or immunizations to develop ways to encourage people to have early health checks for illnesses such as cancer and heart disease. In addition, they try to find out ways to help people to avoid risky behaviors (e.g., engaging in unprotected sex) and encourage health-enhancing behaviors (e.g., regular tooth brushing or hand washing) [2]. Furthermore, the other goal of health psychologists is to educate health professionals, including physicians and nurses, to communicate effectively with patients to overcome barriers to understanding, remembering, and implementing effective strategies for decreasing exposures to risk factors and making health-enhancing behavior changes [5].

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