

THE PERSON-CENTERED MEDICAL INTERVIEW FOR ELDERLY PATIENTS

Marijana Braš^{1,2}, Veljko Đorđević¹



¹ Department of Psychiatry and Psychological Medicine, Clinical Hospital Centre Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia

² Center for Palliative Medicine, Medical Ethics and Communication Skills, University of Zagreb School of Medicine, Zagreb, Croatia

As in other medical branches, person-centered medical interview is an essential and very important tool when caring for the elderly. The medical interview is an integral part of the comprehensive geriatric assessment and diagnostic. The interview must include a complete range of biological, psychological, social and spiritual components. In communication with the elderly and the elderly patients, a special emphasis should be placed on certain challenges that highlight our communication skills, knowledge and personal views. It is essential to understand that older people will have to a much greater extent some functional difficulties that we need to be able to recognize and accommodate in the interview. One of the challenges in communication is certainly the issue how to convey various bad news to patients with serious diseases. When communicating with this type of patients, it is also important to recognize some of the specific emotional responses of old people to the disease. Finally, when we are talking about medical interview, it is of immense importance to organize the consultations with a whole family when we have an elderly patient with an illness. For medical practitioners, it is essential the knowledge how to conduct the interview which will have a high motivational effect on the patient and their health. The interview should be led in such a way to promote healthy aging – to point out the good parts and to encourage healthy life habits – while at the same time explaining to the patient that they can still live a quality life regardless the numerous illnesses. The geriatric assessment is interdisciplinary, requiring a high level of quality communication within the medical team. The patient and their family must be also a member of this team and equal participants in the communication process. Recognizing the importance of the above, we are pleased to have promoted and gradually introduced into the curriculum of the School of medicine University of Zagreb over the past ten years, the new modules dedicated to the communication with the elderly. In the teaching, we have included patients, too, through so called “model patient as a teacher”. This experiential learning method has proven to be excellent and has had the most impact on changing knowledge and attitudes among students and healthcare professionals. We believe that promoting healthy aging is a continuous process in which the improvement of communication is essential element.