Medical Family Therapy 101: The Impact of Childhood Illness

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Introduction

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Objectives

Medical Family Therapy (MedFT)

• Introduction and Overview
• Apply concepts to a variety of cases

Mastering Each New Direction: MEND

• Introduce you to a newly created intensive outpatient family therapy intervention called MEND
• Gain insight into the unique experiences of children living with a serious illness and their family members

**Slides and resources are on-line**
Medical Family Therapy 101
What is Medical Family Therapy?

“Biopsychosocial treatment of individuals who are dealing with medical problems. MedFT works from a biopsychosocial systems model and actively encourages collaboration between therapists and other health professionals.”

(McDaniel, Hepworth, & Doherty, 1992)
Goals of MedFT: Agency

- Active involvement in care.
- Making personal choices when possible.
- MedFT role: helping to control what impact illness does/does not have, learning language of healthcare system.
Goals of MedFT: Communion

- Feeling loved and cared for by others.
- MedFT role: communication with hospital staff + family, joining families against illness, helping patients connect with additional supports.
Where do MedFTs work?

- Medical Centers.
- Community Clinics.
- Transplant Clinics.
- Rehab Facilities.
- Private Practice.
- Teaching.
What does MedFT look like?

- Systemic, relational view.
- Shorter sessions.
- More flexibility.
- Increased collaboration.
- Strength-focused.
- Patient-empowering.
What are the challenges of MedFT?

- Time.
- Flexibility.
- Patient willingness.
- Communicating with providers from other disciplines.
- Power dynamics.
What are the benefits of MedFT?

“Serious illnesses and disabilities provide opportunities for resolving old conflicts and for forging new levels of healthy family bonding.”

(McDaniel, Hepworth, & Doherty, 1992)
What can MedFTs help with?

- Family/systemic problems.
- Trauma.
- Loss.
- Difficult diagnosis.
- Medical uncertainty.
- Prolonged hospitalization.
- Difficulty with staff.
Assessment Tools and Effectiveness of MedFT

- Cognitive-behavioral therapy.
- Solution-focused therapy.
- Motivational interviewing.
- Problem-solving skills training.
- Relaxation training.
- Stress management.
- Involvement of family in care.

(Law & Crane, 2003; Stanley et al., 2009)
Examples
Marketing Your MedFT Services

❖ Add to the treatment teams already in place.
❖ Address the relational, biopsychosocial needs of families.
❖ Help patients take an active role in their care.
❖ Lighten the load of other providers!
How can I learn more?

- AAMFT.
- Collaborative Family Healthcare Association.
- *Families, Systems, & Health.*
- Medical Family Therapy Facebook group.
- Contact any of us!
MEND: A Family Therapy Intervention for Childhood Illness
An Experiential Introduction to Childhood Illness
Childhood Illness, Stress, and Family Environment
The Impact of Childhood Illness

- Between 13%-27% of children in the US have an existing chronic condition that requires ongoing, complicated treatment regimens (Dashiff, Bartolucci, Wallander & Abdullatif, 2005; Fiese, Everhart, 2006; Van Cleave, Gortmaker, & Perrin, 2010)

- The prevalence of pediatric chronic illness has more than doubled in the last 20 years (Perrin, Bloom & Gortmaker, 2007)

- Variety of diseases such as asthma, diabetes, cystic fibrosis, cerebral palsy, seizure disorders, hemophilia, cancer, sickle cell disease, etc.

- Quality of life later on in adulthood is often linked to how the disease was managed during an individual’s adolescent years (Laird, Pettit, Bates & Dodge, 2003).
Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response (FAAR) Model (McCubbin and Patterson, 1982; Patterson, 1988)

- **DEMANDS**
  - Stressors
  - Strains

- **CAPABILITIES**
  - Resources – *family, social, community*
  - Adaptive Coping

- **MEANINGS**
  - Individual
  - Family
  - Community

**FAMILY ADJUSTMENT & ADAPTATION**

The emotional climate within the family is influenced by parental relationship quality and conflict. The parent-child interaction is characterized by relational security and parenting. At the patient level, biobehavioral reactivity, emotional dysregulation, and depression are influenced by psychobiological mechanisms and disease severity.
Chronic Illness Can Be Devastating...

The MEND Program for youth is designed to support the patient and his/her family in maintaining or regaining emotional health and balance during the process of a significant medical illness or treatment such as transplantation, diabetes management, or chemotherapy.

Program Focus

Our compassionate team of expert therapists and clinicians will work with patients and their families on:

- Anxiety
- Body Image
- Treatment Compliance
- Depression
- Family Issues
- Grief and Loss
- Self-esteem

For more information about this program, please call 909-558-9275

LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY
BEHAVIORAL MEDICINE CENTER
The MEND program at Loma Linda University Behavioral Medicine Center offers chronically ill children and their families the opportunity to Master Each New Direction.

Through the biopsychosocial approach to treatment in an intensive outpatient setting, children and their families work with our compassionate team of expert therapists to maintain balance in their emotional health.
Compared to the general population, children who experience a chronic disease are at nearly \textbf{twice the risk} of psychological, developmental and educational problems than other children their age.

\textit{~Tapanes 2011}
Model Terms
Gaze Behavior and Meaning Development

Family:
- Fearful energy
- Cushioning
- Excusing
- Expectation congruence
- Over burdening
- Unbalancing
- Constriction

Social:
- Limiting
- Avoidant
- Comparing
- Isolating
- Creating
- Adopting

Academic:
- Displacing
- Accommodating
- Expectation
- Exclusion
- Acceptance

Meaning:
- Different
- Limited
- Broken
- Unacceptable
- Abbreviated
- Maladaptive power
- Burden
- Responsible
- Shameful
- Guilty
- Illness identification
Whenever we perceive we are physically or psychologically threatened our brain triggers the release of electrical impulses and a variety of hormones. There is a complex hormonal cascade of over 30 stress hormones, such as adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol, which have a powerful and widespread effect on our body's biochemistry, physiology and psychology.
Prolonged levels of cortisol in the bloodstream have negative effects, such as:

- Impaired cognitive performance
- Suppressed thyroid function
- Blood sugar imbalances such as hyperglycemia
- Decreased bone density
- Decrease in muscle tissue
- Higher blood pressure
- Lowered immunity
- Increased inflammatory responses
- Slowed wound healing
STRESS HORMONES

- Breathing rate increases
- Blood flow to skeletal muscles increases
- Heart rate increases
- Blood sugar levels increase
- Blood pressure in arteries increases
- Pupils dilate
- Intestinal muscles relax
The stress of a physical illness can interfere with a child’s ability to meet healthy developmental milestones.

This can cause struggles in other areas of life such as school, social and family relationships.

Anxiety and depression are often present when experiencing a serious illness.

~Tapanes 2011
Program Focus

**Anxiety:** Fears regarding illness, worries about getting sick again, life expectancy and academic, career / social limitations.

**Body Image:** Adjusting to bodily changes due to medication side effects including scars, catheters, and growth limitations.

**Adherence:** Difficulty adhering to medication management, diet, or physical restrictions, and exercise recommendations.

**Depression:** Sadness related to adjusting to a life with limitations, ‘survivors guilt,’ and depression related to missed school days.

**Family Issues:** Rebellion or resistance with medical regimens, affecting family relationships and parenting skills. Parental fears or guilt impacting parental abilities and coping.

**Grief and Loss:** Grieving the loss of a healthy body and a life with limitations of action and longevity.

**Self-esteem:** Feelings of not being normal due to illness medications, diet and physical restrictions.
Circular processes of system feedback toward meaning establishment or management

- Meaning
- Stressor
- Fear, Anxiety
- SNS Deregulation
- Decreased Cognition
- Decreased Integration
- Maladaptive Stimulus Response
- Poor Compliance
- Coauthored Contextual Meaning

Interaction Sequence
Circular Causality
Stressor
Poor Compliance
Maladaptive Coping
Context
External Stress
Meaning
Internal Stress
Decreased Processing / Cognitive Functioning
Sympathetic Nervous System response; decreased cognition, decreased integration; poor limbic and Neo-cortex function.

Systems are Managed By Meaning

Leverage Point
Psychogenic stress responses at 4 or less
Language Learning

Psychogenic Congruence

• Expression
  ○ Art
  ○ Writing
  ○ Verbal process

• Normalization of Experience
• Peer Culture
• Psychoeducation
• Mirroring
• No Co-authorization
• Zero Responses to Identified Power
Language Learning

- Art
- Methods of Expression
- Writing
- Verbal
Dear [Person],

1. Anger and Blame
I hate it when I can't control my emotions. It makes me furious when my mom doesn't listen to me or believe me. I feel used and taken advantage of by everyone around me. I resent my mom not appreciating what I do for her. I am fed up with being lied to all the time. I am furious when she won't even listen to me. I am completely out of control. I am losing my mind.

2. Hurt and Sadness
It hurts me when I feel like I am unappreciated. I feel sad when I don't receive the attention I need. I feel hurt when I am not given the love I deserve. I feel angry when I am not given the respect I want. I feel betrayed when I am not given the support I need. I feel hurt when I am not given the love and attention I deserve. I feel相近 when I am not given the love and attention I deserve. I feel hurt when I am not given the love and attention I deserve.

3. Fear and Insecurity
I am afraid of what will happen to me if I don't get the attention I need. I feel scared that I will be left behind. I am worried that I won't be able to make it on my own. I am afraid of the future. I am scared of the unknown. I am worried about the future. I am scared of the unknown. I am worried about the future.

4. Remorse and Responsibility
I am sorry for the things I have said and done. I am sorry for the pain I have caused. I am sorry for the hurt I have inflicted. I am responsible for my actions. I am responsible for the consequences of my actions. I am responsible for making things right.

5. Intention and Wishes
I want to continue making improvements. I want to get better. I want to live many years with my transplant. I want to keep improving my relationship with my mom.

6. Love, Forgiveness, Understanding, and Gratitude
I love you because you are strong. Thank you for never giving up. Thank you for moving on through all those rough times. I'm proud of you for going through all those things. I understand that it is hard. I forgive you for feeling like you have to give up. I love it when you keep getting through all this illness.

Love,
[Signature]
Kyle’s Story
Wrap up

In small groups of 3-5, respond to this question:

“How will I apply or adapt the ideas and techniques presented in this session to my own clinical work?”
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MedFT Resources

*Medical Family Therapy Facebook Group


