

Rolling the dice creatively – Therapeutic interventions with difficult patients J. Battaglia, MD (10/08)

Brief history of the “difficult patient”

Research on difficult patients

- 1) Diagnoses/conditions: chronic pain, non-compliance, fibromyalgia, SIB, AODA
- 2) Chronic complaints with little improvement and no recognized treatments
- 3) More experienced clinicians have fewer difficult patients

Therapeutic alliance with "difficult patients"

- 1) Therapeutic alliance - a working relationship (therapist and patient) toward shared goals
- 2) Empathy - identification with and understanding of why a person thinks, feels, acts as they do
 - best tool for developing empathy is learning about the person first-hand
 - "friendly" vs. "friendship"
 - not learning to "like" the patient
 - not feeling what the patient feels (sympathy)
- 3) Empathy allows positive regard, and development of a therapeutic alliance

Some tools for development of the therapeutic alliance with difficult patients:

Acknowledge that the patient is difficult

Learn about the patient first-hand (develop empathy)

De-compress the time-line of treatment

Lower goals

Visualize the patient as a character in a not-yet finished novel

PLUSSING

Carpe Diem

Do not attempt to force trust when the patient has no reason to trust you

Therapist disclosure (use with caution)

Pacing

Consultation with patient (role playing)

Consultation with SO, family, friend

Consultation with other professional

Methods to address stalling

Trauma... "take your time" (first develop strength, safety, support)

Strength model for mental health

Humor