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Common Sense Affects Coping Strategies for Chronic Disease

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Reviewed by John M. Grohol, Psy.D. on October 22, 2010

Patients with chronic disease are most often not experts on their condition. Much of what they believe about their disease is based on "common sense," according to researchers at the University of Granada.

Common sense makes up the cognitive representation a person has of a chronic illness and comes from such areas as a person's own experiences, self-knowledge, social environment and relationships.

Researchers noted that "the idea that patients have of their disease affects their own coping and adaptation to it".

In order to assess how common sense perceptions impact a patient's coping mechanisms, researchers developed a test for measuring the cognitive representation a person has of their disease.

The criteria behind the measurement are based on five aspects of the disease including symptoms, causes, impact on a patient's life, process for controlling the condition and the timeline/progression of the disease.

Conducted by Marcarena De los Santos Roig with the department of Social Psychology and Methodology of Behavioral Sciences at the University of Granada and led by Professor Cristino Pérez Meléndez, the study was designed to open up new insights into helping patients with coping skills.

Specifically, researchers hope that the tool will lead to the development of enhanced clinical psychological treatment strategies that will be much more efficient than what is currently available.

The study included a sample of 155 patients from the University Hospital San Cecilio's Department of Endocrinology who were diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes. While the sample revolved around patients with diabetes, researchers noted that the process was developed to measure cognitive perceptions in any patient with a chronic disease.

Different tests were administered to patients regarding the perception of their disease. Researchers pointed out that similar tools are available in other countries but had not been completely adapted and translated into Spanish by national researchers.

Findings revealed that when diabetic patients report a high number of symptoms, perceived they had little control over their disease and believed the illness had a heavy impact on their lives, overall health and coping skills were worse than groups with different perceptions.

Individuals with these cognitive representations of their disease presented with worse physical, psychological and social functioning, as well as a poor mental health, lower vitality and worse overall physical health.

Alternatively, those patients who perceived that the disease had a heavy impact on their lives but also believed they had some control over that impact presented more positive scores. These patients tended to face their disease more actively by seeking out social assistance and applying behavioral coping skills.

Researchers noted that the results confirm the reliability of the scores obtained on the scale developed for use in the study as well as its effectiveness. They added that the tool developed by the University of Granada is the most complete and reliable of all existing assessment tools.

Source: [University of Granada](#)

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