

I'm Teo Sjolbergh Today we are here to discuss HIV/HCV and the experience of post traumatic stress upon the patient/client and the caregivers. PTSD can come as a result of living through traumas without the tools to manage the trauma ourselves. This makes us seriously overwhelmed and often frightened into non-response. After the trauma occurs this terror can live deep within the person and can create personality and mood disorders. Some who have had a previous trauma or a concurrent personality and or mood disorder, can find the old trauma can go so deep that it layers onto newer traumas putting the person in risk of self compromise, or even worse, self hurting and suicide ideation. Today let's take a look at this dynamic and try to find some solutions to recognizing PTSD in our client/patient population.\_\_\_\_

Some folks have more choices than others. Some folks are more creative with how they use the choices available to them. This isn't just luck of the draw, but can also be a result of personal resourcefulness.

The diagnosis itself can often cause PTSD, especially if a person feels their life is in danger, by a force out of their control and that an early demise will be the result, can set the stage for PTSD.

Identify if such a situation occurred in the patient's history.

PTSD affects how we see ourselves, feel ourselves and communicate to the world who we are. In other words PTSD affects our identity and how we value life and relationship.

Chronic illnesses like HIV and HCV, along with most serious mental health disorders will require medication for life. This requires full medication adherence in order to maintain the health of the individual in order to ensure long term wellness. When one has anxiety disorders like PTSD or a mood disorder, a consistent lifestyle is often torn away from them. The question of the clinician is how to ensure the efficacy of treatment. Get to know the patient along with a big dose of compassion.\_\_\_\_

I define mental illness as a loss of adaptability to every day stress responses. This loss of flexibility powerfully affects the choices available to us, and even more importantly how we act on those choices.

Disgusting as it is, stigma lies in the world of humanity. Stigma is real and when people are stigmatized, they often becoming part of marginalized communities. Learn about your client/patients world and world view and start by working within their view.

There is a spectrum of distress in folks with PTSD. Some have more adaptability than others. Others 'feed' on the distress until they 'crash and burn'. Still others feel the movement of a butterfly's wing across the room. Remember their experience is real, even if you try diminish it, or think you can change it, their experience is what counts.

Medications for HIV have given life back to those who only a few years ago would have a limited life span and a diminished quality of life. This is because of the cocktail of antiretroviral meds we call HAART. Without adherence, the virus copies like crazy and we can become ill again. Medications for HCV are not as predictable in efficacy and often require long waiting and planning for treatment. Both treatments can be devastating emotionally and depression and the re-activation of PTSD and other disorders is very common.\_\_\_\_

Re-experiencing symptoms. Frequent upsetting thoughts or memories about a trauma. Recurrent nightmares. Acting or feeling as though the trauma were happening again 'flashback. Feelings of distress when reminded of trauma. Physical responses, surge in heartbeat or sweating when reminded of trauma.

Avoidance symptoms. Making an effort to avoid thoughts, feelings, places or people associated with the traumatic event. Difficult memory for the trauma. A loss of interest in important once positive activities. Feeling distant from others. Difficulties feeling positive feelings. Feeling as though your life has been cut short. Addictions.

Hyper-arousal symptoms. having a difficult time falling asleep and staying asleep. Hyper-vigilance. Irritability and difficulty with anger. Being jumpy or easily startled.

A person doesn't need to have all these symptoms to be diagnosed with PTSD. Rarely would anyone have all the above symptoms., but there should be a collection of symptoms from the above clusters along with an identified trauma.\_\_\_\_

Mental health medications often take a few months to make a difference, and require patience and a caring manner from the clinician. In addition to these medications, HIV and HCV medications often have side effects that make compliance difficult at times. The larger the pill burden the higher chance of adherence problems. People with PTSD often go through the "nothing matters" syndrome. This is a major warning sign to the clinician.

There are higher rates of health problems in these with PTSD. These include; substance abuse, sleep disturbance, deliberate self-harm and reduced immune responses.

Addiction is a form of self-medicating to cut memories or physical pain associated with the abuse. Addiction is common in folks PTSD and can take the person down very dangerous paths of destruction. Especially in folks who have HIV and/or HCV, substance use can further complicate treatment by limiting liver function.

Lower cd4-cd8 ratio affects immune function.

Mental health issues co-existing.\_\_\_\_

"I don't care about going to therapy anymore. Nothing is working out for me, I'm never going to get better. No one cares about me or what I do, what is the point of going on. I'm feeling a little down, this must mean I'm falling into a deep depression again. Nothing you can do matters and I will be like this forever."

"Everyone is getting on my nerves lately. I just don't feel happy, even when I'm around people I know and love. I am beginning to feel really jumped and on edge. My mood keeps changing rapidly, I minutes I can go from feeling really happy to really down and terrified."

"I just don't have the energy to take care of myself in the morning, I haven't showered in days. I don't want to be around people anymore, I'm isolating myself. I'm drinking or using other substances more, but just to take the edge off of my feelings a little. I've noticed that I'm less talkative than usual."

Non adherence is a warning sign. A serious one.\_\_\_\_

This is my personal description of mental illness. Stress affects our natural resourcefulness. The fight or flight response, so necessary for survival is locked in the 'ON' position. The powerful inner stress of the person with PTSD is profound. This stress response once useful to survive now limits the choices available.

Trust in others is damaged, as is the ability to trust in self. This is why many with PTSD turn to addiction and dangerous sexual practices, even when they know that they are hurting themselves. 'Out of control' feels right and normal, especially when 'out of control' is how many folks describe their experience of PTSD. It becomes locked in at the time of the trauma.

Living a full life, while for most of us is a natural desire, escapes many with PTSD. If your body demands excessive attention every day, requiring sometimes 20-30 pills a day, planning for tests and doctor's appointments, trying to manage relationships which are important for survival and money food and supportive treatments, who has time for fun or joy.

Particularly for those diseases that are stigmatized, and/or for those folks who come from marginalized communities.\_\_\_\_

Hypochondria Every little body issue becomes a life and death illness. This can affect judgement so that really dangerous issues are avoided because of fear. The minor issues are manageable. Non specified fear of death is often behind this. PTSD and those with chronic illness are very prone to this,

OCD Control rules these folks and feeling out of control is often co existent with this anxiety disorder

Isolation Safety and protection from a world that is too stimulating can keep these folks at home for long periods. This can affect getting proper exercise and food.

Paranoia "They are out to get me." I think it is obvious how someone with PTSD could feel this way.

Co-existing personality or mood disorders The layering of PTSD onto pre- existing conditions is a fascinating phenomena, as is the layering of multiple traumas upon the psyche of a person.

Addiction issues.\_\_\_\_

You must be able to exhibit the qualities required of the person with PTSD. Humility goes a long way to bridging the gap between health and illness. People who have PTSD are extraordinary tuned in to artifice and perky well meaning "healers" aren't going to get far with these folks.

These qualities will help you in treating and empowering those with PTSD.

TRUST i.e. How much do you trust your client to tell you if they are in harm's way? How much do you trust your own follow through abilities. Commitment.

HOPE i.e. What is your relationship to hope? Do you believe in transformation? How do you define healing? He you dealt with your own demons?

CARING i.e. Do you have healthy boundaries? Do you care for yourself in the ways you exact of your client/patient?

ADAPTABILITY i.e. Can you be flexible in you treatment plan, keeping the needs of you client/patient first?\_\_\_\_

Identify the patient's mental health situation upon diagnosis or shortly there after. Encourage changes in behavior while waiting for entering medication, or while waiting for HCV levels.

If you aren't a psychiatrist, put in the order for the first opening to a doctor to prevent danger to the client/patient. It can take time to get that appointment.

Begin mental health medications ASAP. Get the client/patients used to taking them every day. This will help them to get used to the HIV/HCV medication regimes. Pill burden.

Complimentary and alternative medicine can assist the treatment plan developed for the client/patient. CAM is useful for sleep, side effects, minor illnesses, anxiety and much, much more. Many community resources available (the nearest ASO will have info). When they feel emotionally more balanced, adherence is simpler and its importance has more meaning because LIFE has more meaning.\_\_\_\_

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