Medically Unexplained Symptoms

Integrated Diagnosis and Treatment

David D. Clarke, MD
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this session, the participant will be able to:

Learning Objective 1: Assess patients with medically unexplained symptoms (MUS)

Learning Objective 2: Elicit patient cooperation

Learning Objective 3: Link psychosocial stresses to symptoms

Learning Objective 4: Treat common causes of MUS
Diagnosing A Baffling Illness
Psychophysiologic Disorder (PPD)

Illness caused by
past or present
psycho-social stress.
(Often with altered
neuroanatomy.)
Francis Peabody, MD

(1881-1927)
Harvard Medical School

“In all your patients whose symptoms are of functional origin, the whole problem of diagnosis and treatment depends on your insight into the patient’s character and personal life…”

Symptoms Relieved after a Nine Month Negative Work-Up
A note from the Referring Physician

“Thank you for helping her. It is reassuring to know that I didn’t miss anything important.”
Cause of Presenting Symptoms
Landa, Psychosomatic Medicine, 2012.

Outpatient Primary Care

- PPD: 30%
- Organic: 55%
- Psychiatric: 15%
A Wide Range of Presentations
Women Undergoing Laparoscopy


% Childhood Sexual Abuse

- No Pain
- Pelvic Pain
Costly and Frustrating

- No definitive tests
- “Mega” workups
- False positive tests
- Serious illness ruled out but Sx persist
Addressing Skepticism

• Early on, mention Stress effects on the brain as a possible cause of symptoms.

• Stress can alter CNS pain-processing circuits.

• Analogy with “knot” in the abdomen when tense.

• Stress-related pain is real & not self-inflicted.
PPD Symptoms result from a Physiologic Process

Stress

Symptoms
Stress Evaluation Part I

The Illness Chronology
Stress Evaluation Part II

Current Stress
Stress Evaluation Part II - a

Insufficient Personal Time
Stress Evaluation Part III

Childhood Stress
Asking, Listening, and Accepting: A Sequence of Questions

Did you experience stress as a child?

How much? (0-10 scale)

Why that number?

What if it was your child?
Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Study

Ten Factors Measured: 18000 Patients

1-3. Physical, Sexual or Verbal Abuse

4-5. Physical or Emotional Neglect

6-8. Family member depressed or mentally ill, addicted or in prison.

9. Witnessing abuse of mother

10. Losing a parent to separation, divorce or death
### 4+ ACEs vs Zero ACEs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IV Drug Use</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide Attempt</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol Abuse</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multiple Somatic Sx</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.7</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COPD</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obesity</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
More ACEs ->
More Victimization
Additional ACE Outcomes

Organ Disease (Heart, Autoimmune, Cancer, Diabetes, Asthma, Migraine, Peptic Ulcer)

Chronic Back Pain

Mental Health Disorders (Bipolar, Eating Disorders, Schizophrenia, Anxiety, Depression)

Difficulty in School
Stress Evaluation Part IV

Depression
Stress Evaluation Part V

Post-Traumatic Stress
Stress Evaluation Part VI - a Generalized Anxiety Disorder
Stress Evaluation Part VI - b

Social Anxiety Disorder
Stress Evaluation Part VI - c

Panic Disorder
A Barrier to Good Outcomes

Patients are often reluctant to accept referral to a Mental Health Professional for a physical symptom.
Two Useful Statements

Stress causes symptoms via effects on the brain.

A specialist can complete a Stress Evaluation.
Treatment of Current Stress

Listing Your Stresses
Treatment of Current Stress

Self-Care Time
Treatment of Childhood Stress

Acknowledge Their Heroism
Treatment of Childhood Stress

Writing
Treatment of Childhood Stress

“Do You Like to Read?”
All Royalties are Donated.

“Wonderful.” (Yale)

“Truly remarkable.” (UNC)

“Extremely valuable.” (Berkeley)

“A spectacular accomplishment.” (OHSU)

www.stressillness.com
Additional Evidence-Based Books

- **Unlearn Your Pain** (Schubiner)
- **Childhood Disrupted** (Nakazawa)
- **Pathways To Pain Relief** (Anderson & Sherman)
- **PsychophysioLogic Disorders** (Abbass, Clarke, Clark-Smith, Schubiner et al)
The Mystery Solved
Another Mystery: Linda’s 550 Days
Somatic Expression of Rage
The Talking Cure
Stress Causes
Real Symptoms
Effective Treatment is Available
www.PPDAssociation.org

Facebook Page for Updates
What if there was a blood test for PPD?
Section Title