

THE FAMILY AND PHYSICAL ILLNESS:
AN EXAMINATION OF IMPACT AND COPING

This course will examine the interaction of family and physical illness from a variety of theoretical and clinical perspectives. A range of disease entities, including acute, minor illness, psychosomatic conditions, chronic illness, physical disability, childhood malignancy, and death and dying, will be covered. Both personal accounts and research literature will be used to examine how various forms of physical illness can a) effect the family unit and b) prompt the family to generate various adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanisms in response to the illness stressor.

THE FAMILY AND PHYSICAL ILLNESS: A COURSE PROPOSAL

The goals of this course are several: 1) To provide students with an active understanding of systems theory as it has been applied to the family unit 2) To acquaint students with different theoretical models analysing the relationship between the family unit and physical illness 3) To explore, through personal accounts and research literature, how various forms of physical illness a) have effected the family and b) have prompted the family to generate various adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanisms in response to the stressor of illness.

It has been established that the family is an important health-and-illness-defining unit, and that families tend to experience illness as a unit. Clinical experience and research studies have documented that major illness is related to psychosocial problems not only for the identified patient, but for all family members as well. It has also been observed that the introduction of illness into the family system prompts both functional and dysfunctional coping strategies. Both impact and coping styles will be identified and explored.

The family may be considered as an etiologic variable in relation to illness; as a dependent variable (the effect of disease on the family); and as a mediating variable (how the family acts on the illness). In terms of the family as a dependent variable, several models of family response to serious illness have been generated. These are both descriptive and conceptual in nature, and in some cases predictive. These models will be presented to provide a theoretical context from which to view various disease entities. Others have emphasized the family's etiological or mediating role in relation to the development of disease (in particular, the psychosomatic family constellation) will also be explicated.

The course will examine the interaction of family and illness from a variety of perspectives, as the issues faced by families vary depending on several factors: 1) The nature of the disease entity (including chronicity, physical symptomatology, and prognosis) 2) The stage of the family life cycle at which the illness strikes 3) The identity of the affected family member and his or her family role 4) The manner in which the family has responded to previous crises 5) The meaning of the illness to the family 6) The coping resources available to the family 7) The family process (how the family functions in general).

Finally, the course will briefly consider family-oriented interventions on the part of the physician and/or other health care personnel that might increase the coping skills of families identified as particularly vulnerable to the stress of major physical illness.

The course format will rely on a combination of didactic presentation and group discussion based on required reading. Guest lectures on major topics (ie., cancer and the family, the family of the disabled etc.) will be integrated into the weekly meetings. A theme paper, based on an interview with a patient and family, and a daily family-oriented health log, will be required of all participants. Opportunities for research relevant to the course topic are also available, involving participation in studies looking at the impact of various diseases (diabetes, childhood cancer, otitis media) on the family system.

FAMILY AND PHYSICAL ILLNESS

<u>Session Number</u>	<u>Discussion Topic</u>
1	The Family System
2	Family and Illness: Overview
3a	Models of Family Response
3b	Family's Response to Minor Illness
3	Psychosomatogenic Families Anorexia Diabetes Asthma
4	Family's Response to Chronic Illness (Non-life-threatening and life-threatening)
5	Role of Family in Physical Disability
6	Childhood Malignancy and the Family
7	A Death in the Family
8	Health-Promoting Family-Oriented Interventions

READING LIST

Psychosomatic Families, 1978
Salvador Minuchin, Bernice Rosman, Lester Baker

Role of the family in the Rehabilitation of the Physically Disabled, 1980
Paul Power and Arthur Dell Orto

Childhood Malignancy: The Psychosocial Care of the Child and his Family, 1979
David Adams

Miscellaneous Selected Articles:

Yesterday's Child, 1976
Helene Brown

A Private Battle, 1979
Cornelius Ryan and Kathryn Ryan

Journey
Robert Massey and Suzanne Massie

David
John Gunther

The Other Side of the Mountain
E. G. Valens