

FAMILY PHYSICIAN ATTITUDES TOWARD AND PERCEPTIONS OF PATIENTS – REVISED 3/13/00

Johanna Shapiro, Ph.D.

1. PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:

Statement of the Problem: “Difficult” patients have long been recognized as a problem in health care (1-3). Patients perceived as difficult frustrate their physicians (4,5). They are often high utilizers of health care (6,7), and are frequently characterized by the presence of various mental (8) and personality disorders (9) and multiple somatic symptoms (10,11). They also tend to have poorer functional status, more unmet expectations, less satisfaction with care, and perceived lack of control over their illness. It is often difficult to change the interactions of these patients and their physicians (12), although a variety of strategies has been employed from cognitive behavioral approaches to antidepressant drug therapy (13,14).

Yet despite evidence of frustration, we have little information about whether primary care providers are less empathic toward “difficult” as compared to “typical” patients. This study is a pilot investigation to determine whether, among a population of experienced clinicians, self-reported empathy is less when treating a perceived “difficult” patient.

Goals of the Project: Research Question: In a population of experienced primary care physicians, **are there measurable differences between perceived “difficult” and “typical” patients in terms of physician self-reported frustration and empathy?**

Hypothesis: The study hypothesizes that physician subjects will express more frustration and less empathy toward patients they perceive as difficult. Further, we hypothesize that frustration and empathy will be related to variables of patient age, ethnicity, gender, and diagnosis.

Specific aims: To answer the research question, the study will accomplish the following: 1) Practicing family physicians will be asked to evaluate their levels of frustration and empathy toward patients they perceive as difficult. 2) Six months later, these same physicians will be asked to complete the same questionnaire regarding a “typical” patient.

2. **BACKGROUND OF INVESTIGATOR:** Johanna Shapiro, Ph.D. Dr. Shapiro received her Ph.D. from Stanford University in 1975, and is a tenured professor in the University of California Irvine Department of Family Medicine, where she has taught for the past twenty years. She has over 60 empirical and theoretical publications and has experience directing several small research projects. She has published several case reports and conceptual articles on the use of patient narrative in health care.

3. RESEARCH PLAN:

[VOLUNTEER FACULTY LETTER - CONTROL] *Jo*

V+c

Dear Dr. _____:

The UCI Department of Family Medicine is sponsoring an interesting research project for which I am requesting your assistance. We are studying physicians' perceptions of and feelings toward patients in their practice whom they regard as "difficult." In order for you to participate, all you need to do is

- 1) Sign the enclosed consent form
- 2) Complete the enclosed one page survey
- 3) Return both pages in the stamped addressed envelope
- 4) Be willing to complete the same one page survey in three months' time

All information obtained from this study will be treated confidentially. No names or personal identifiers appear on the survey. This research project has been reviewed and approved by the UCI Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects.

Thank you in advance for your help. If you have any questions, or would like additional information, please don't hesitate to contact me at 714-456-5171 or jfshapir@uci.edu

Sincerely,

Johanna Shapiro, Ph.D.
Professor

This project has the full support and endorsement of the UCI Department of Family Medicine.

Joseph Scherger, M.D. MPH
Chairman, Department of Family Medicine
Associate Dean for Clinical Affairs

8 [FORMER RESIDENT LETTER - CONTROL] R+L

Dear Dr. _____:

Greetings from the UCI Department of Family Medicine and your old behavioral scientist, whom I hope you remember – and occasionally think of with fondness! I am involved in an interesting research project for which I am requesting your assistance. We are studying physicians' perceptions of and feelings toward patients in their practice whom they regard as "difficult." In order for you to participate, all you need to do is

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V+E

8 [VOLUNTEER FACULTY LETTER - EXPERIMENTAL]

Dear Dr. _____:

The UCI Department of Family is sponsoring an interesting and FUN (!) research project, and we hope you will consider becoming involved.

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT YOU MIGHT BE A CREATIVE WRITER? EVEN A POET? DO YOU HAVE THE SEEDS OF LITERARY GENIUS WITHIN YOU? EVEN IF YOU DON'T THINK SO, READ ON!

We are studying physicians' perceptions of and feelings toward patients in their practice whom they regard as "difficult." In addition to completing a very brief, one-page questionnaire, we are giving you the opportunity to write a short short (one page) story or poem about a "difficult patient."

Then, if you would like and only with your permission, your effort will be entered in the department's First Annual Creative Writing Contest, in which a panel of physician and non-physician experts will judge submissions for creativity and literary merit. **AWARDS WILL BE GIVEN!** One *First Place* prize (\$50 and a commemorative plaque); two *Second Place* prizes (\$25 and a written commendation); three *Third Place* prizes (\$10 and a letter of recognition). In addition, with permission, the work of everyone who returns the imaginative writing assignment will appear in a bound volume sponsored by the department titled "Creative Writing by Family Physicians about Difficult Patients".

In order for you to participate in this study, all you need to do is:

- 1) Sign the enclosed consent form
- 2) Complete the enclosed one page survey
- 3) Complete the creative writing assignment and evaluation
- 4) Return all three pages in the stamped addressed envelope
- 5) Be willing to complete the same one page survey in three r

Needs my signature

Needs Dr. Schrag's signature

All information obtained from this study will be treated confidential. I have your explicit permission for the authorship of the creative writing assignment to be disclosed. No names or personal identifiers appear on the survey. This research project has been reviewed and approved by the UCI Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects.

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5. Please write a brief (2-3 paragraph) “story” or poem about how the patient’s illness has affected his/her life or your relationship with this patient *from the patient’s point of view*. You may use either 1st person “ Having diabetes has been very hard on me...”, or 3rd person “Sometimes he thought he didn’t like his doctor much...”, as long as you attempt *to describe the patient’s experience*. Because this is an imaginative exercise, you do not have to adhere strictly to known facts about the patient. Use the space provided below.

Please check one:

I would like to enter the above creative writing in the UCI Department of Family Medicine First Annual Creative Writing contest.

I do not wish to submit the above creative writing in the UCI Department of Family Medicine First Annual Creative Writing contest.

EVALUATION OF IMAGINATIVE WRITING TASK

PLEASE RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS USING THE FOLLOWING SCALE: (1 = not at all, 5 = a great deal)

This exercise:

1. Increased my empathy toward this patient
2. Increased my insight into this patient
3. Increased my appreciation for the complexities of this patient's problems.
4. Suggested new ways in which I might approach management of this patient
5. Increased my understanding of my own feelings toward this patient
6. Improved my understanding of the reasons for difficulties in my relationship with this patient.