

AoD Feedback

Assignment #5 –

Thank you for reporting on the results of your emotional detachment/emotional overinvolvement monitoring. You've come up with a very interesting insight – i.e., when you are putting out a lot emotionally for one patient (perhaps as you did with the baby with botulism), you “compensate” by pulling back a bit emotionally with other patients, ending up with a kind of emotional “average.” Of course there are no right or wrong ways of doing this; and of course everyone is going to have different levels of emotional connection with different patients. The way I look at it is that we all might strive for a certain baseline of emotional connection that we feel is owed every patient, no matter how difficult or distasteful; at the opposite end, there is probably a level of emotional engagement beyond which we start feeling overwhelmed and losing our emotional center. I don't think the precise numbers matter (everyone will set them somewhat differently). But I'd suggest that we never want to fall below a certain point, no matter how much emotional energy and effort we are expending on other patients. You've raised a really intriguing idea, and I hope we get to discuss it in more depth in class. Regards, Dr. Shapiro

Assignment #6 –

--, thank you for writing about how much your grandmother's death affected you. I think you are right about anticipatory grief in the sense that trying to “prepare” ourselves for loss is not very successful. Intellectually trying to imagine a loss is very different than the actual emotional experience of the loss. That sensation of “losing our minds” in response to the death of someone with whom we have a close emotional bond is perhaps one way we have of acknowledging the feeling that with the passing of that person, we are losing a part of ourselves. I do not think in any sense you were depressed or weak. What you were doing was experiencing true grief, not just the sadness of losing someone you cared about, but were not really close to. Grief can be devastatingly painful. I hope with time the emotions have softened, and that you now think of your grandmother not only with mourning, but also with gratitude for her presence in your life. Thank you again for entrusting me with this experience of loss. Best, Dr. Shapiro

Self-Change Project

--, what a great project you came up with. I like your focusing on tensions on the team. You're right that this can be very unpleasant, and can also spill over negatively into patient care. I also liked the simplicity of your intervention – just smiling seems as though it couldn't possibly change anything. And yet perhaps it did! Of course as you point this is not a well-controlled, double-blind study. But it's worth at least considering the possibility that a simple smile can have a positive effect on group dynamics. By smiling, you are putting positive energy into the mix, and it may well influence people's attitudes and behavior.

Self-Change Project

--, you did a great job on this project. You defined a worthwhile goal (“being less tense and more calm and confident”); an appropriate intervention (speaking with confidence

and calmness, without worry about evaluation); anticipated obstacles (feeling anxiety because of focusing on grades, evaluative analysis, and time constraints). Your summary of your project was quite interesting. For one thing, it shows that even personal qualities that we count on as “part of us” can go into hiding in response to external pressures and stresses. Luckily, as you discovered, such qualities are rarely gone for good, and with a little attention can be revived and nurtured. I especially liked the way you used “self-talk” to overcome your feelings of anxiety and nervousness. This can be a very effective way of challenging the story you’re telling about your situation, and replacing it with a “better,” more comfortable one. It also sounds as though being more relaxed and confident also may have had a positive effect on your patients, in the sense that they seemed more open and forthcoming; on your residents: when you behaved confidently, they treated you more respectfully; and on your attending and nursing staff. Perhaps most importantly, allowing yourself to be confident and comfortable made you feel happier and less burned-out. I hope very much you are able to keep this project in mind as you begin your internship year. Although you will be back in a situation of frequent evaluation, hopefully you can remember that acting with appropriate confidence and calmness will have positive consequences all around. Excellent job, --. Best, Dr. Shapiro