Understanding the Family System

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Power of the system
Goals and Objectives

1. Introduction to family systems
2. Identify how your family functioned and what role(s) you played in that functioning
3. Recognize how your role in the family set you up for professional success and how it might cause trouble for you
What is a System?

Any system consists of several individual parts (members) that are essential and related to one another when a certain outcome is desired.

Exhmining the family system demonstrates the powerful patterns within that system.
Why Study Your Family System?

1. Members of a family system fit together to form a functional family unit.
   -- You were assigned a job, partially related to your birth order, sex, personal skills, and family expectations.

2. The past and present interact.
   -- Your family system was influenced by past values/rules, personalities and events.
   -- You bring your skills and expectations with you into the present.
Why Study Your Family System?

3. The patterns have predictive value.
   --Your skills give you a unique set of strengths…
   AND a unique set of vulnerabilities (see next slide).

4. Recognizing these patterns can help avoid repeating or transmitting them in the future.
   --You have choices.
Physicians often come from emotionally barren families that train the child to cope by focusing externally, often valuing achievement and healing others instead of practicing self-care.

...medicine becomes a strain only when the physician asks him or herself to give more than he/she has been given. (Vaillant, 1972)

Medical training encourages an over-reliance on cognitive intelligence to the detriment of emotional intelligence.

Extended schooling often delays emotional maturity as the physician does not have to interact with the external world, often until they are in their 30s.

Training encourages the development of a false external persona, depicting competency and self-reliance.
Compulsive Personality

**Strengths**
- Intellectual rigor
- Conscientiousness
- Reliability

**Trait**
- Doubt
- Guilt
- Exaggerated Responsibility

**Challenges**
- Self-esteem problems
- Helplessness
- Omnipotence

Adapted from Gabbard (1983), Nace (1995) and Georgia PHP (2013)
The power to stay the same

The concept of homeostasis means that the system seeks to maintain its customary organization and functioning over time. It tends to resist change. This concept of homeostasis can explain why a certain behavior has surfaced at a given time, why a specific person has become the problem and what is likely to happen when the system begins to change.
Triangles
**CHANGE**

**1st order**
Adjustment within existing structure
Doing more or less of something
Non-transformational
New learning not required

**2nd order**
New way of seeing things
Shifting gears
Transformation to something different
Requires new learning

The National Academy for Academic Leadership. www.thenationalacademy.org
Open System vs. Closed System

Interaction between internal members and external environment.

Isolation between internal members and external environment.
What happens here, stays here.
Family Roles

Hero
Clown
Scapegoat
Lost Child
Care taker

Virginia Satir - 1972
**Strengths**
- Successful
- ‘9 going on 40’
- Decision maker
- Self-discipline
- Self-sufficient
- Responsible

**Challenges**
- Perfectionist
- Inability to play
- Controlling and rigid
- Judgmental
- Hard time admitting they need help

*Virginia Satir / Claudia Black*
Clown/Mascot

Strengths
- Sense of humor
- Flexible
- Ability to relieve stress and pain
- Social director

Challenges
- Attention seeker
- Distracting
- Annoying
- Immature
- Poor decision maker

Virginia Satir / Claudia Black
Scapegoat

Strengths
- Creative
- Less denial, greater honesty
- Shows feelings
- Sense of humor
- Ability to lead

Challenges
- Inappropriate anger
- Self-destructive
- Intrusive
- Irresponsible
- Underachiever
- Rebel

Virginia Satir / Claudia Black
Lost Child

**Strengths**
- Independent
- Flexible
- Ability to follow
- Easy-going
- Quiet

**Challenges**
- Inability to initiate
- Isolates/withdraws
- Low self-esteem
- Confused
- Lack of intimacy
- Difficulty seeing choices
- Feel like a victim

*Virginia Satir / Claudia Black*
Caretaker

**Strengths**
- Empathetic
- Good listener
- Sensitive to others
- Always smiling
- Caring/compassionate
- Generosity

**Challenges**
- Inability to receive
- Anxious
- Fear of anger or conflict
- Denies personal needs
- Martyr resentment
- High tolerance for poor boundaries in others

*Virginia Satir / Claudia Black*
Group Exercise

Family of origin and patient interaction
Group Exercise

1. Your family role (job): hero, caretaker, clown, scapegoat, lost child
2. Family position: only, oldest, middle, youngest
3. Conflicts: Avoided, violent, discussed appropriately, loud, won by someone
4. Spoken and unspoken family rules
Group Exercise

5. Describe your most unlikable patient, the one who makes you feel the least competent to help or causes you to react out of character.

6. Remember your last patient encounter that did not go well and discuss possible family connections both yours and theirs.
When asking for something, use the acronym – DRAN

**Describe**

**Reinforce**

**Assert**

**Negotiate**
When asking for something, use the acronym – *DRAN*

- **Describe**
- **Reinforce**
- **Assert**
- **Negotiate**
Describe

- Describe the other person’s behavior objectively
- Use concrete terms
- Describe a specified time, place & frequency of action
- Describe the action, not the “motive”
Reinforce

- Recognize the other person’s past efforts
- It takes eight positive comments to compensate for one negative comment.

Assert Directly & Specifically

- Express your feelings
- Express them calmly
- State feelings in a positive manner
- Direct yourself to the offending behavior, not the entire person’s character
- Ask explicitly for change in the other person’s behavior
Negotiate: Work Towards A Compromise That is Reasonable

- Request a small change at first
- Take into account whether the person can meet your needs or goals
- Specify behaviors you are willing to change
- Make consequences explicit
- Reward positive changes
Questions