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Opinion Article

Opinion Article: The role of psychological features in chronic diseases, advancements and perspectives

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Nowadays, a growing interest links clinical psychology and chronic diseases. This concern is appreciable as it refers to several current changes to medical progress and areas of scientific production.

As suggested by the Ministry of Education, University and Research (D.M. 4th October 2000), the core of Clinical Psychology is represented by the study methods, the intervention techniques in the various operational models, the clinical psychological applications in several areas and fields such as healthcare, psychological distress, psychological aspects and psychopathology.

The advancements related to clinical psychology involves evidence-based applications, referred to the presence of psychological concerns, such as for chronic diseases. Moreover, the increase in patients' life expectancy produces a higher incidence of chronic diseases. This leads to a significant increase of morbidity and mortality, as highlighted by several contributions (Conversano, 2019; Vos et al., 2017). The word *clinical* refers precisely to the specialistic commitment in those conditions requiring a scientific-based relationship between the clinician and the patient.

A recent example of great scientific interest, for the contents and the vastness of production, was the special issue published on *Frontiers in Psychology* (2019), "*Psychological factors as determinants of medical conditions*", accompanied by the editorial (Martino, Langher, Cazzato, & Vicario, 2019) and the opinion article (Conversano, 2019), concerning the key role of psychological factors.

It is known that on one hand psychological factors may influence the psychic integration of disease, adaptation, compliance, adherence (Mirdrikvand et al., 2019; Settineri, Frisone, Merlo, Geraci, & Martino, 2019), and that on the other hand chronic illness could burden the subject's emotional experience (Lauriola et al., 2019; Settineri, Frisone, Alibrandi, & Merlo, 2019). It is also true that psychological features and cognition may impact affectivity, emotions and perceived quality of life (Fiegl, Lahmann, O'Rourke, Probst, & Pieh, 2019; Guicciardi, Carta, Pau, & Cocco, 2019; Guicciardi, Crisafulli, Doneddu, Fadda, & Lecis, 2019; Marchi et al., 2019; Martino et al., 2018, 2019a).

Psychological manifestations related to chronic pathologies are extended to different levels, from cognitive needs and representations (Kelly, McDonald, Jensen, Sidles, & Le Rue, 2019; Martino et al., 2019b), to symbolization and constitution of the Self processes (Caputo, 2019; Langher, Caputo, & Martino, 2017; Marchini et al., 2018; Settineri, Frisone, Alibrandi, & Merlo, 2019).

The presence of psychological features interfering with the adaptive needs of the subject, recalls defensive mechanisms whose purpose fails due to their widespread use (Ciuluvica, Amerio, & Fulcheri, 2019; Settineri et al., 2019), as clinically highlighted by psychosomatic outcomes.

These dynamics evoke the famous body-mind problem (Motofei & Rowland, 2015, 2016), which makes it difficult to establish a clinical management involving both physical and psychic aspects. A collaborative model represents a step forward for the aims of medicine and clinical psychology, useful to value the emergence of manifestations and meanings (Rowland & Motofei, 2017).

In order to promote the patients' existential integrity, it would be proper to consider the outcomes involving pathological conditions related to neurodevelopment (Klein et al., 2019; Fabio et al., 2018), and issues related to internal medicine themes (Catalano et al., 2018; Funuyet-Salas et al., 2019; Lauriola et al., 2019; Péterfalvi et al., 2019).

All these perspectives represent a substantial progress highlighting the key role of psychological evaluation and assessments in daily medical assistance, as a first step towards the activation of integrated clinical practice.

All this leads to an increasing interest for the academic communities, useful for the integration of clinical psychology and the recognition of its role in medical settings, in order to offer a substantial contribution to a deep evaluation of patients.

This valuable interdisciplinary approach provides a complementary clinical psychological support aimed at deeper evaluation of patients.

In conclusion, the closeness between the scientific evidences foreseen by the considered studies, pointed out the interdependence between physical and psychic entity, that may restore the patient through a sense of integrity and existential meaning. This kind of integrated daily approach offers the opportunity for a deeper elaboration of the inner world, congruently with the perceived good quality of life for both physical and mental components.

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