The future of psychiatry is psychodynamic

Dr Gwen Adshead
g.adshead@nhs.net
Evidence based Psychodynamic principles

• The brain-mind organisational complex is organic and changes in response to somatic and psycho-social experience: including psychological interventions

• Human mental life is complex and layered: what is on the surface is rarely all there is and humans rarely use algorithms in interpersonal contexts involving high levels of emotion

• Much mental function and communication is unconscious to the subject, but may be perceived by others

• Early childhood adversity is a strong predictor of adult relational problems and mental disorders; because it sets patterns of relating

• Humans are social animals and their emotions affect one another, even if this is not always conscious. Emotions are primarily embodied.

• Psychological defences evolved in relation to group life and maintain homeostasis in social situations
What does this mean for psychiatry?

- Psychodynamic principles make psychiatry person-centred and relational for both parties
- Psychodynamic principles make psychiatry more like general medicine: focussing on the patient’s unique experience, and getting alongside them; appreciating that there is a range of ‘normality’; medication is adjuvant
- Psychodynamic principles support recovery by letting the patient own their narrative of their experience and sharing responsibility for positive change
- Psychodynamic principles support the exploration of values and the complexity of emotions behind values and human dilemmas
- In fact, being a psychiatrist who uses these principles is the kind of psychiatrist the patients want to see
Brains are important to psychodynamic psychiatry
Brains change when new information is learned

- Eric Kandel: the only psychiatrist to have won the Nobel prize
- For his work on synaptic change in response to environmental experience
- Evidence of change of genetic expression in response to stimuli; and effect on protein synthesis
- Implications for memory, mood regulation and trauma responses
- Kandel’s own memories of 1933
- Kandel (2018) Psychotherapy as a biological treatment

This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-SA
The glass is half full!
The glass is half empty.
Half full... No! Wait! Half empty... No, half... what was the question?
Hey! I ordered a cheese burger!

The four basic personality types
Psychodynamic psychiatry helps people with psychotic disorders and personality dysfunctions

- Sees disorders and dysfunctions on a spectrum of severity
- Which can get worse in response to relational stress
- Reality testing capacity and personality structure affects how you ‘do’ your social world
- So relational understanding is crucial
- Personality pathology predicts Axis 1 diagnoses and makes them worse (and vice versa)
- Like other long term medical conditions, medication is always adjuvant to the experience of the relationship with the disorder and the impact on your life story
Defences are for life not just for membership

Anna Freud: the Ego and mechanism of defence.

George Vaillant & Michael Bond: Harvard Study of Adult Lives and DSQ.

Isobel Menzies Lyth: study of organizational defences.

Phoebe Cramer: Protecting the Self.

Every day psychological defences
Work in progress

- What kind of psychiatrist do you want to be? What kind of service do you want to run?

- When you chose to be a psychiatrist, what did you want to do? What did you want to understand?

- What do you still want to learn and understand?

- ‘I look inside my patients’ heads... not just at the neurotransmitters but at their personal psychology and with social-cultural attention... that’s what a doctor does’ (Suzanne O’Sullivan, neurologist, Queen’s Sq)

- ‘In an ideal NHS, it would be good if every doctor in training would reflect on the mystery of the human being with both the learning of the scientist and the observation and sympathy of the novelist or the poet’ (Michael Mayne, writer and patient, 2006)
Thank you for your attention

Getting help from mental health services

Sorry, you're not mad enough

You are the correct amount of mad.
Here, we will put you on an 18 month waiting list.

Sorry, you're too mad

Rubyetc