

*Difficult knowledge: What we
can learn from psychoanalysis
for our patients, our treatment
and ourselves*

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Disclosure Statement

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Introduction

- Professionals are recipients and conveyors of knowledge
- Professional carries the burden of the knowledge they will convey
- “Knowing” can have conscious or unconscious affect
- Impact of difficult knowledge on professionals, patients and families
- Psychoanalytic perspective
- What to do

Objectives:

As a result of this course, participant will be able to:

1. Identify and describe characteristics of difficult knowledge.
2. Identify and describe the impact of difficult knowledge in terms of “cost” to patients and clinicians.
3. Identify strategies for imparting and coping with difficult knowledge.

What is difficult knowledge?

Difficult knowledge is “a concept meant to signify both representations of social traumas in curriculum and the individual’s encounters with them in pedagogy” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 755).

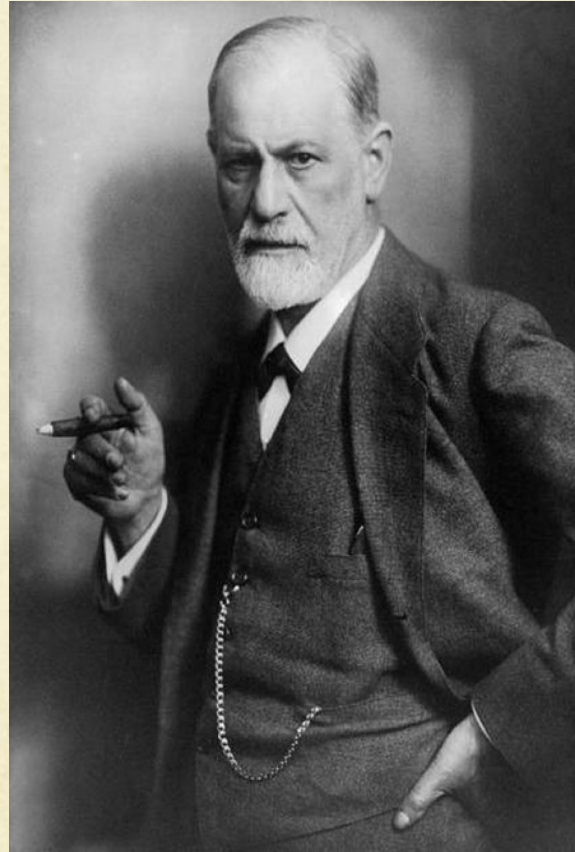
“*Difficult conversation*” defined as “a conversation with considerable emotional and values-system investment” (Martin, et. al., 2015, p. 1248).

“Given that medicine has historically relied on artful conversation, it is perhaps surprising that there is sparse literature on how well clinicians recognize and manage their emotions during difficult healthcare conversations, and even less literature on educational models to enhance awareness and strategic utilization of these emotions” (Martin, et. al., 2015, p. 1249).

Why is this important?

82% of speech-language pathology graduate students feel inadequately prepared and identify a need for more in-depth training in counseling and more opportunities for counseling practice (Kaderavek, Laux, & Mills, 2004).

Role of Freud's theories and psychoanalysis in difficult knowledge



Premises of psychoanalysis

Behavior comes from unconscious need

Use of defense mechanisms

Defense mechanisms can be protective

Defense mechanisms that persist beyond the time they are useful, become maladaptive.

All people use defense mechanisms

Defense mechanisms

- Compensation
- Repression
- Denial
- Identification
- Reaction formation
- Regression
- Projection
- Rationalization

Positive defense mechanisms

- Sublimation
- Humor
- Altruism

What we know about imparting difficult knowledge

- Unconscious is the “third participant”
- Resistance to learning
- Training
- Experience

Resistance

Resistance is a defense mechanism in which the patient has an opposition to progress. It applies to the person who would accept help, yet undermines attempts to make progress (Frosh, 2003).

Psychological “cost” of knowing and imparting difficult knowledge

“Illness, he observes, demands that we accept what seems at the same time both true and impossible to bear... Knowing can entail a loss of friends, loss of an imagined future, and a loss of established frames of emotional security. The fear that attends illness is usually more intense, conscious, and constant than the fears of thinking a new thought.” (Alcorn, 2013, p. 128)

- Perspective of medical professionals
- Coping
- Hostility
- Resiliency
- Maladaptive behaviors

We are all connected

“When clinicians enter into emotionally charged conversations with patients and families they enter into privileged worlds, sacred spaces, places formerly not their own. Clinicians thereby become woven into the patient’s, the family’s world, their memories. Whenever the patient’s family recalls ‘the moment we heard such and such’ it will be the clinician who conveyed the news, for better or for worse, who will be conjured.” (Martin, Mazzola, Brandano, Luff, Zurakowski, & Meyer, 2015, p. 1251).

What to do?

- Research supports targeted training to improve communication of difficult knowledge (Shaw, et. al., 2015).
- Human factor is always present
- All people and situations are different

According to the Wizard of Oz

Providing care with courage, brains, and heart, based on analogy of the Lion, the Scarecrow, and the Tin Man from the Wizard of Oz (Myer, 2014, p. 108).

Conclusions

- Through this presentation, we have seen that healthcare providers carry significant burdens beyond those of the “job.”
- The burden of knowing, imparting, and coping with difficult knowledge can be mediated through emotional preparation, training in strategies and applied practice having difficult conversations.
- Difficult knowledge fully encompasses the impact of the various aspects of the knowledge process, from learning, to knowing, to conveying for both the learner and teacher, in this case the patient or family and the healthcare provider.
- It has been determined that the costs of difficult knowledge are high, and often result in maladaptive behaviors for the patient, their family caregivers, and the healthcare professionals.

Conclusions (cont.)

- There is some evidence that supports that some people may have a higher level of inherent ability to cope with difficult knowledge. This is based on the early development of strong primary relationships, personal characteristics of extroversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, along with use of reflective techniques to find emotional strength and meaning-making,
- Remember the Wizard of OZ

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