

Physician Well-being

Are we suffering more
than makes sense?

Daniel O'Connell, Ph.D.

1816 1st Avenue W

Seattle, WA 98119

206.282.1007

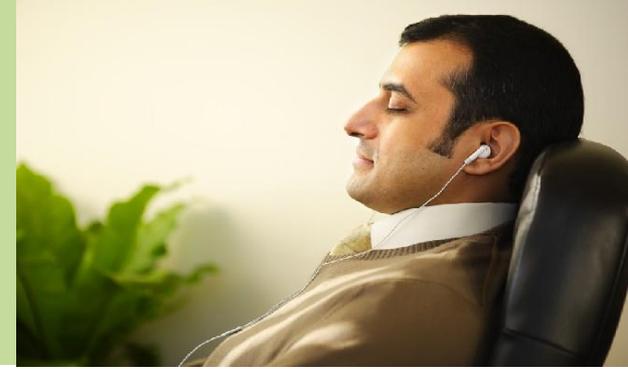
danoconn@me.com

Disclosures



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Learning Objectives



- Differentiate real from unnecessary suffering
- Uncover distortions that fuel distress
- Develop antidotes for excess suffering
- Memorize the “serenity prayer”

Real or Unnecessary Suffering?



- Plenty of *real* reasons to feel distressed with medicine and healthcare
- But, are you making it worse than it is?
 - Differentiating “pain and suffering”
- How do you know when you are starting to suffer more than makes sense?

Burnout



When the load consistently exceeds the capacity, practice becomes unsustainable

Factors that predict satisfaction and wellbeing

- **Control over practice environment**
- **Reasonable work demands**
- **Collegial support**
- **Satisfaction of treating patients**

Freeborn 2001 West J Med 2001; 174:13-18

4 Key Elements To Sustainability



Energy

Energy renewal is available each moment as one moves throughout the day

Presence

The human connection can provide deepest satisfaction

Mindfulness

Being fully present in our attention to where we are, what we are doing and what is happening in the moment

Time efficiency

A compassionate, thoughtful practice style that uses time wisely by combining the above three qualities with technical and office management skills

Linearity, Complexity and Well Being



“Find it and fix it” and the “doctor-centered visit” create an illusion of control with unanticipated consequences

“It’ s false promise of control leads to unrealistic expectations and when those are not met to feelings of anger, failure, blame and shame.” (Suchman)

So, don ’t give up all intentionality and control, but hold your intentions more lightly.

Egner, B. and Suchman, A. Essays in Medical Encounter; Spring 2002.

Serenity Prayer



God grant me the serenity to accept the things I can't change, the courage to change the things I can change, and the wisdom to know the difference.

So How Do We Inadvertently Increase Our Suffering?



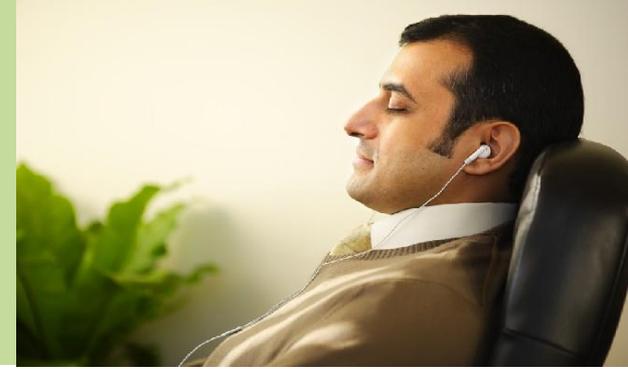
- **Distorting “reality” by distorting thoughts**
 - **Magnify frustration and minimize satisfaction**
- **Making the wrong comparisons**
- **Making ineffectual protests vs. tackling problems within circle of influence**
- **Replaying frustrating experiences and not remembering satisfying experiences**

4 Ways to amplify troubles:



- **Failing to solve a problem you do have**
- **Trying to solve a problem you don't have**
- **Using the wrong solution**
- **Using the right solution unskillfully**

Two Types of Problem Solving



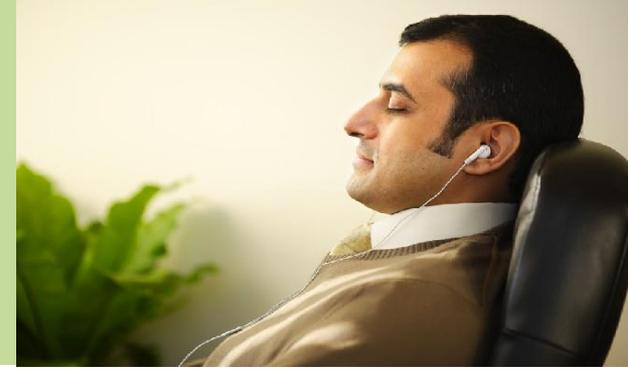
Assimilation:

- Fit into the existing repertoire
- Strategy 1: more of the same
 - *Speaking and moving more quickly*

Accommodation:

- Re-evaluate, re-structure
- Strategy 2: not more of the same, but something different
 - *Use fewer words and pause to create calmer pace*
 - *Fit expenses to match income from reasonable workload*

How We Increase Our Suffering:



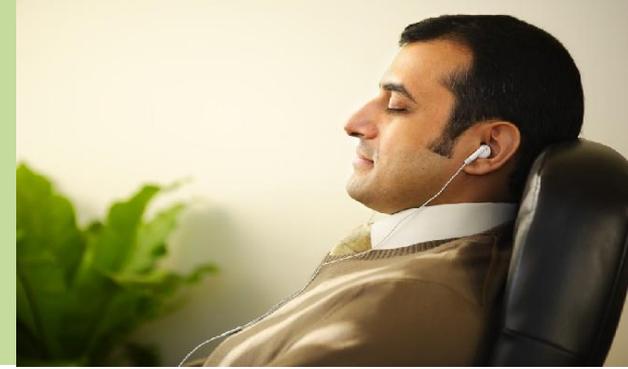
- **Negative Contagion**
- **Alienation from Patients**
- **Losing connection to the present moment**
One human encounter at a time, enriched by being fully present even if only for a moment
- **Failing to relax and let go**
- **Forgetting to be grateful for....**

In-group/Out-group Psychology: Alienation from *Them*



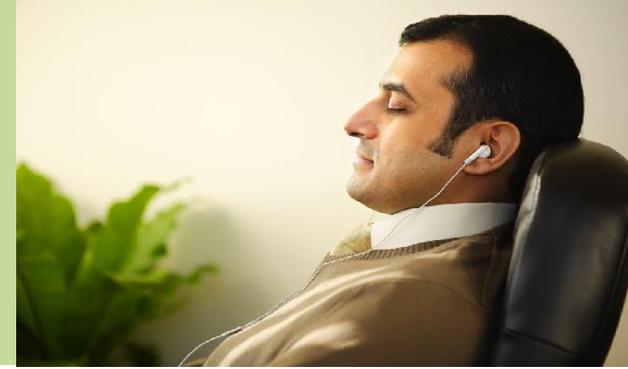
- Dehumanize the out-group - *them*
- Assign *them* bad/overlook possible good intentions
- See *them* as diabolically clever or moronically stupid
- Be maximally sensitive to your own distress and attribute it to *them*
- Don't acknowledge distress your behavior may cause *them*

The “Toxic Environment”



- **Too much complaining/cynicism**
- **Insufficient gratitude expressed**
- **Distortion that amplifies suffering**
- **We live a worse life in our minds than we live in reality!**
 - **Out of many equally plausible and valid stories**

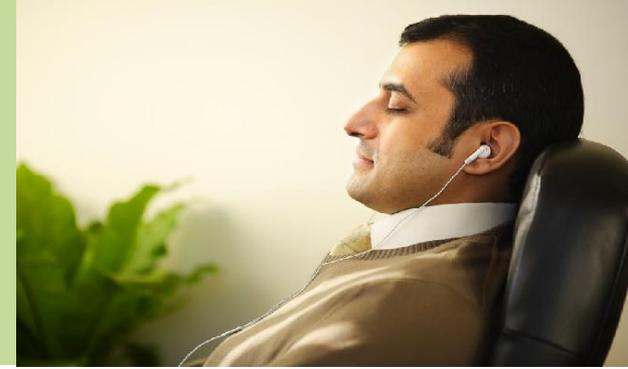
Cognitive Therapy



- **Thoughts affect moods**
- **We can observe our internal and external dialogue**
- **Take each statement as a hypothesis**
- **Ask if accurate or distorted/invalid**
- **If distorted, create a valid (consistent with reality) alternate thought that is more encouraging**

Burns D. 1999. The Feeling Good Handbook

Distortion: All or Nothing Thinking



You see things in black or white categories. If a situation fall short of perfect, you see it as a total failure.

Yes/No questions suggest all or nothing

“Did the medicine help?”

“Did you have a good day at work?”

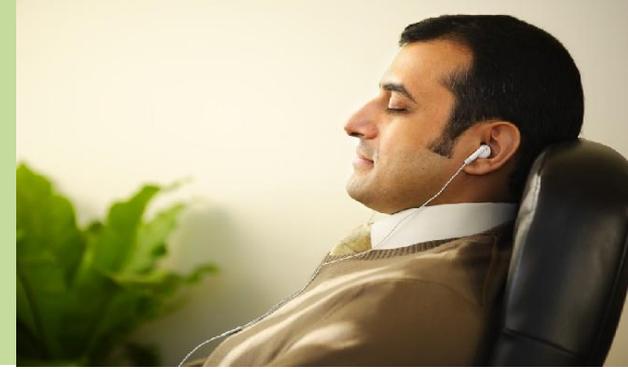
“Do you enjoy being a doctor?”

Distortion: Over Generalization



You see occasional distressing events, such as a difficult encounter, as a never ending pattern of defeat by using words such as “always” or “never”.

Distortion: Mental Filter



You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively, so that your vision of all of reality becomes darkened.

e.g., You remember and dwell on the two frustrating patients and not the 20 others who were quite grateful for your help.

Distortion: Discounting the Positive



You discount positive experiences but obsess about disappointments and criticisms.

e.g., If you do a good job, you may tell yourself that it wasn't enough because....

You are depressed at the idea you may be just "average" and "unremarkable"

e.g., All I am is a primary care provider

Distortion: Making Comparisons



Humans are constantly comparing themselves/being compared to others

When we compare ourselves to people who we think are doing better than us we feel distress.

We over-personalize comparative data rather than step back and become curious.

e.g., “I will ask her how she gets her charting and messages handled in so much less time.”

Distortion: Jumping to Conclusions



You interpret things negatively when there are few facts to support your conclusion.

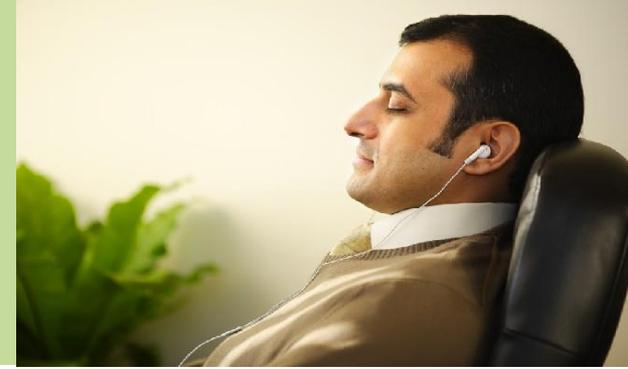
- **Mind reading:** without checking it out, you conclude that someone is negatively reacting to you, rather than to the situation.
- **Fortune-telling:** you predict that things end badly.
 - If you don't have your regular MA, you tell yourself *"This will be miserable day!"*

Distortion: Emotional Reasoning



- **You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are:**
 - “I feel terrified on airplanes. It must be very dangerous to fly.”*
 - “I feel angry. This proves I ’m being treated unfairly.”*
- **Just because you feel a thing more strongly does not mean that it is more true!**

Distortion: “Should” Statements



- **You tell yourself that things should be the way you hoped or expected them to be.**
 - **Instead of “preferred” “wished” or “hoped”**
 - **Directed against yourself leads to guilt and momentary relief when accomplished.**
 - **Directed at other people or the world lead to anger, criticism, discouragement**

Distortion: Fundamental Attribution Error



- **Attributing the cause of events and outcomes to dispositional rather than situational factors**

e.g., “The reason you are late is that you are self-centered and don’t care about others’ time and feelings!”

“No, the reason I am late is that I needed to run over with my last patient and then I could not find a parking spot close to the restaurant!”

Ways to Untwist Your Thinking



- **Identify the distortion**
- **Examine the evidence, looking for exceptions**
 - Instead of assuming that your thought is true, examine the actual evidence for it and against it.
 - e.g., *If you feel that “administration” has it in for you, look for any examples of where administration has been fair or generous.*

Continue Un-twisting Your Thinking



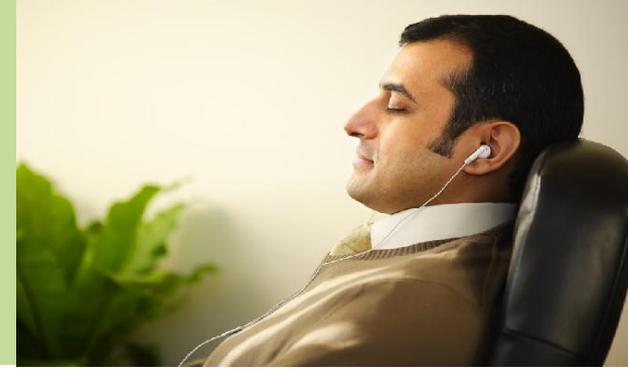
The double standard method

- instead of putting yourself down in a harsh, condemning way, talk to yourself in the same compassionate way you would talk to a friend

The experimental technique

- Do an experiment to challenge fortune telling.
 - I will get up and run before work on Tuesday and see what happens.

Continue Un-twisting Your Thinking



Thinking in shades of gray

- More and less rather than always or never
- “More often than I prefer...”
- “Not as often as I would prefer...”

Ask for genuine feedback

“Do I seem to be exaggerating?”

“Have I gotten too negative?”

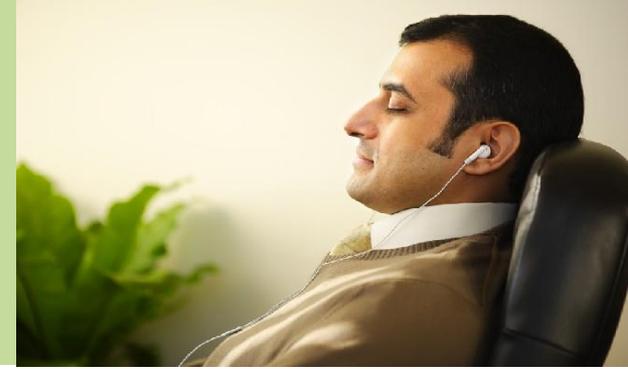
“How do you manage to be less bothered by this than me?”

Untwisting Your Thinking



- **Define terms**
 - When you label yourself or others define the terms
 - Careless, irresponsible, narcissistic, incompetent
- **Identify emotions** when using judgmental labels
 - Is she “incompetent” or am I feeling impatient?
- **The Semantic Method (words matter to the psyche)**
 - Substitute language that is less extreme and loaded.
 - E.g., Instead of saying “*Things must be this way.*” try, “*I would prefer it if things were this way.*”

Untwisting Your Thinking



Re-attribution

Look for contributions to a problem rather than blame.

Reconsider Lerner's "Just World Hypothesis"

Fairness is one of the most easily distorted concepts (self interest, justification, memory, wishful thinking)

Cost benefit analysis

What are the advantages and disadvantages of a feeling (like anger), a negative thought (like "No matter how hard I try, I always fail"), or a behavior like complaining/ventilating.

Noticing and Refuting “Suffering” Thoughts



Suffering Thought

Valid Thought