
Communications

A Personal Inventory

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In the provision of primary care, physicians need a systematic method of obtaining information about patients' life problems, emotional status, and personal functioning which is not unduly time consuming. Some years ago, the Psychological Systems Review¹ was developed to provide physicians with a systematic interview method of obtaining relevant psychosocial information including the patient's emotional status, life situation, and personality. While this structured interview outline was comprehensive, it proved to be rather time-consuming, perhaps requiring 20 to 30 minutes of the physician's time. Certain psychological tests such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory,² depression rating scales,^{3,4} anxiety rating scales,⁵ and measures of Life Stress⁶ may be useful in practice, but are either cumbersome or lack comprehensiveness.

The Personal Inventory

The Personal Inventory (Appendix) was constructed to provide a brief measure of the patient's current concerns, emotional status, life stresses, and personal functioning. The Personal Inventory consists of a set of rating scales by which the patient describes his situation and himself. The Inventory requires about 10 to 15 minutes of the patient's time to complete. For patients with limited reading ability, less than sixth grade level, the physician may use the Inventory as an interview guide. The Inventory may also be completed by the physician to describe his/her perceptions of the patient and the patient's situation. The inventory is intended for use with those patients about whom the physician has some concern regarding signs of emotional distress, evidence of life stress, possible psychosomatic problems, personality problems, or a more serious mental disorder. The Personal Inventory is not a formal psychological test. It is designed to provide information for the physician and the patient which can serve as one basis for discussion and decision making with the patient about his/her problems and resources, and needs for psychological assistance.

The Personal Inventory includes questions pertaining to:

- Well-being: how well or poorly the patient has been feeling lately

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Appendix

A Personal Inventory

Harold Ireton, Ph.D.

Name G.D. Date Completed 10/10/79 Age 45
 # _____ Birthdate _____ Sex Female
 Occupation Secretary Marital Status Married
 Education High School, Business College Number of Children 2

Answer each question by circling the number which best describes how you are feeling, your situation and yourself.

How well have you been feeling lately?	Well	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Poorly
How concerned, worried, or unhappy are you about:											
Your health?	Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Your level of energy?	Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Health of family members or friends?	Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Your work situation?	Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Your financial situation?	Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Your living situation?	Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Your marital situation?	Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Your sexual life?	Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Your children?	Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Your friendships?	Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Your recreational life?	Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Your personal habits? (eating, drinking, smoking, drugs, rest)	Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
How worried or anxious are you?	Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
How unhappy or depressed are you?	Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
How irritated or angry are you?	Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
How upset, confused, or overwhelmed?	Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
How much pressure or stress is there in your life?	None	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	A lot
How many changes have occurred in your life in the past year?	None	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	A lot
How much emotional support do you get from other people?	None	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	A lot
How able are you to handle the stresses in your life?	Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Able

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Appendix, continued

Describe yourself, using the following:

Optimistic cheerful, enthusiastic, energetic	Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Active busy, on the go	Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Friendly outgoing, sociable	Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Sensitive understanding, sympathetic	Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Independent self-sufficient, resourceful	Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Dominant assertive, aggressive	Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Hardworking ambitious, persistent	Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Responsible reliable, dependable	Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Happy-Go-Lucky relaxed, easy-going	Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Emotional excitable, easily upset	Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Intelligent capable, clear-thinking	Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Practical common sense, judgment	Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Adaptable able to adjust, flexible	Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very
Self-Confident self-assured, self-accepting	Not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very

What are you most satisfied with about your life or yourself?

My ability to get along with all types of people and to be adaptable to new situations

What would you most like to change about your life or yourself?

I would like most to develop self-confidence in my own abilities

- Life concerns: regarding personal health, level of energy, health of family and friends, work, financial status, living situation, sexual life, children, friendships, recreational life, and personal habits
- Emotional-mental status: including anxiety, depression, anger, and mental confusion
- Life stress: including pressures, life changes, amount of emotional support from others, and ability to handle stress
- Personality: including outlook on life, activity level, sociability, sensitivity, independence, dominance, level of ambition, responsibility, level of tension, emotionality, intelligence, common sense, adaptability, and self-confidence
- Life satisfaction/Desire for change: regarding sources of satisfaction and changes the patient wishes to make in his life or with himself

Case Illustration

The Personal Inventory Profile presented here is for a 45-year-old married woman who came to the family practice clinic complaining of rightsided jaw pain for the past month. A visit to her dentist had produced no relief. History and physical examination were unremarkable; probing in the interpersonal area produced some defensiveness. The patient did reluctantly admit that she and her husband were having some problems, for which they were receiving counseling.

The patient was asked to complete the Personal Inventory at home and return for further discussion the following week, to which she agreed. Her Personal Inventory Profile reveals concerns in the areas of marriage and work; she is not particularly concerned about her health, despite her presenting complaint. More detailed history revealed that she had been spending her nights rather sleeplessly worrying about her problems and grinding her teeth in the process. The inventory and the discussion revealed some anxiety and depression, but of a manageable degree. She showed that she was under a fair amount of pressure, but felt that she had good emotional support from others, and perceived herself as quite able to handle her life stresses. The personality profile suggests an optimistic, sociable, resourceful, responsible individual who, however, lacks confidence in herself. In this regard, she stated that she experienced much satis-

faction from her work and was frustrated that she was not currently employed. Her personal satisfactions focused on her "abilities to get along with people and to adapt to situations." In marked contrast, she would like to change the fact that she does not have enough confidence in herself.

This woman is "well-adjusted" in most respects, but pays a personal price in physical symptomatology by virtue of all that she attempts to handle without adequately dealing with her own feelings, and by virtue of her own self-doubts. Subsequently, she was referred for private psychological counseling which she chose as the most desirable alternative for her at the time.

Comment

This case history is intended to emphasize the structure and utility of the Personal Inventory, especially as it can serve as a vehicle for discussion and for identifying problems, resources, and psychological needs with the patient. As previously stated, caution should be exercised in treating the patient's report as literal and valid. Some patients may be very defensive in the face of such an inquiry; others may exaggerate their problems. When judiciously utilized, the Personal Inventory can provide a useful tool for physicians in dealing with the psychological aspects of patient care.

References

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