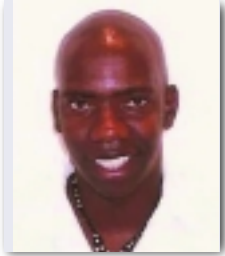


Somatoform Disorders

Challenges to Clinicians – Checking the Blind Spots



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Patients with medically unexplained symptoms continue to intrigue, fascinate and frustrate clinicians.

They are common in general medicine and often present with apparent neurological, dermatological and other clinical disorders

Definition

Somatoform disorders is a group of psychiatric conditions in which bodily sensation or functions are influenced by a disorder of the mind.

Core features

Characteristics of somatoform disorders are two enduring clinical features.

1. Somatic complaints that suggest major medical maladies, yet have no associated serious, demonstrable organ disorders.
2. Psychological factors and conflicts that seem important in initiating, exacerbating, and maintaining the disturbance

Moreover, their symptoms are not wilfully controlled as in Malingering

Challenges to Clinicians

In the ordinary practice of medicine, as long as the patient can render a concise chronicle of events and present a straightforward account of bodily perception underlying pathophysiological event, the primary

care physician has a remarkably good chance of making an appropriate diagnosis and instituting a corrective treatment. However, it becomes understandably difficult for the physician to develop an accurate diagnosis when the somatoform patient forgets (represses) or refuses (suppresses) to share with the physician certain medically relevant, critical events, or when the somatoform patient magnifies or diminishes internal stimuli in a fashion that is not usual and customary for a given medical or surgical condition.

The medical history of this patient is sometimes vague, inconsistent and disorganised.

Their complaints are sometimes dramatic, vague, emotional and exaggerated

These patients often receive regular medical care from several medical practitioners, often at the same time.

Types of somatoform disorders

1. Somatisation disorder

Is a chronic syndrome of Multiple Somatic Symptoms which cannot be medically explained. It is associated with psychosocial discomfort and seeking medical help.

2. Conversion disorder

Is a disorder characterised by one or more neurological symptoms that cannot be explained by a known neurological or medical disorder.