

LIFE REVIEW AS A CLINICAL TOOL SEMINAR Instructor's Guide (60 minutes)

Key Points:

1. Communication is an important factor influencing patient satisfaction
2. Patient centered encounters result in improved patient and physician satisfaction, and fewer diagnostic tests and referrals. This approach does not extend the office visit time.
3. The patient's values and beliefs significantly affect health behaviors and outcomes.
4. Empathy is the ability to share the feelings of another. Conversation helps maintain and strengthen empathy.
5. Life review often provides an opportunity to grapple with past unresolved tension. It involves evaluating one's life and may prove therapeutic.
6. Reminiscing focuses on review of the past and often serves a social or recreational function.
7. Both open ended questions and structured formats prove useful in life review.
8. Life review often is used at the end of life to search for the meaning of one's life.

Activities:

1. Discuss the possible value and role of life review in medicine. (Slides – 15 minutes)
2. Listen while a classmate tells you about the branching points in his/her life. Be sure to allow time for summary. (15 minutes)
3. Talk to a classmate about important branching points in your life. Be sure to allow time for summary. (15 minutes)
4. Discuss the experience of the short life review exercise. (5 minutes)
5. Show life review video and discuss as wrap up. (10 minutes)

Directions to Participants:

This exercise is not about data gathering. It is about getting to know a person. The experience will help you understand your mentor better. In the process you will learn what it is like to conduct a life review. We will not quiz you on this exercise, yet we hope you learn how life review and reminiscing may be of value in medicine, and how values, beliefs, and circumstances influence health and health behaviors. Paradoxically, the present medical system rewards physicians for diagnosing and treating disease, and not for listening and considering the patient as a person (Cluff, 2001; Spiro, 1993).

Interview Questions:

1. Your life like a tree or river has had branching points. Would you tell me about your life? What events, experiences, or circumstances have most affected your life – been the branching points that shaped your life?
2. What **health related** events do you think were most important – that caused a branching point?
3. What **stresses** have caused branching points?
4. What **successes or happy times** have caused branching points?

Words to Encourage Life Reflection, Reminiscing, and Stories:

1. Tell me more.
2. Where did that lead?
3. How did that affect or influence you?
4. What meaning does that have for you?

Visualizing or Diagramming the Life Review:

Many methods can be used to visually depict a person's life. A life line is a chronological representation of happenings in one's life. Another is to use a tree or river which most closely simulates the branching metaphor and will be helpful in presenting what you have learned from your mentor in an integrated fashion.

First, think of how you might characterize the tree based on what you learned in the life review interview. Consider roots, branches, size and location. Next, draw the tree with its distinguishing branches and characteristics. Once this is complete insert representations for important events. Symbols can be used for various types of events. You may use words or symbols to depict important events and values. Color-coding may help to distinguish various types of events. For example, green may stand for major growth events. Red may represent health events, gold for successes and blue for stresses.

Finally, an important step in completing the life review interview is to review the diagram or visual representation of the other's life with him or her. Check with the individual to determine whether or not the assessment is accurate and complete. Make modifications according to the feedback you receive. This dialog fosters understanding and offers the listener a chance to show empathy by demonstrating that they have listened and heard the other. Remember this is your mentor's story, and your mission is to understand how they perceive their life, health and well-being.

Personal Uses of Life Review & Reminiscing:

Maybe you will find this exercise to be valuable in talking with a patient, friend, or family member who is dying. Years from now when *you* reminisce about medical school, you will have your own stories to tell. Perhaps a relationship with a peer, a faculty member, a patient, or even your mentor may cause a branching point in your life. You may find that in your life's story, your class grades and rank were not even mentioned, and that patients, not their diseases, remain clearest in your mind.

Case Presentation:

Use the video to present a case for discussion.

Reflection Questions:

1. What was it like for you to participate in a life review interview with a peer? What is like to be the listener? What was it like to be the speaker?
2. What did you learn from listening to your peer's life review?
3. What might you learn from the person you interviewed about their medical history and the meaning of their health?