



## **Holistic mental health view empowers patients**

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Coming to a diagnosis of mental health problems is as essential as with physical health problems. Receiving an accurate diagnosis can directly impact the type of treatment that is most likely to be effective for you.

However, as has been discovered with most physical health conditions, it is important to look at the whole person rather than just an ailment from which that person suffers. Such a holistic view has to include a person's strengths, beliefs from one's upbringing and later adaptations, spiritual values, and developed coping skills to name only a few.

Our circumstances and experiences, are all unique.

However, without some way of grouping problems, there are such limitless possibilities that we are unable to make any sense of what we see. Thus, we have to search for ways to put experiences together into categories of issues while recognizing the limitations of these categories.

One way of thinking about the range of mental health problems we see is to think of them as being affected by three factors: Our biochemical makeup, our learned behavior and the events that we have experienced. We have to avoid the danger of seeing these factors as totally separate because the more we know of how our bodies work the more we see that these factors are interconnected. Traumatic events, as one small example, change our biochemistry in ways that are just now being better understood.

Weighing the effects of these three factors, as they have contributed to the

development of any individual's problems, helps the therapist and the patient to talk about how the problems came about and how treatment can be helpful.

With most current forms of therapy, the source of one's problems is of less importance, but people still often feel a need to have some way of understanding the critical factors that occurred in their lives and how they have contributed to their current struggles. Looking at the weighed contributions of these factors together gives us one method of planning how treatment will help the person make the changes he wants to make.

Thus, an assessment of a person with a mental health problem requires a clinician and a patient collaborating to paint as thorough a picture as possible of the factors that have lead to the present problem and struggle. This picture has to include a diagnosis that takes into account the unique characteristics and experiences of the person. At that point, the clinician and the patient are able to make informed decisions about how to proceed in treatment in ways that are most likely to help.