**Reflection: Integrating Mental Health into Cystic Fibrosis Care**

A lot of chronic diseases come with mental health challenges, which is why it’s imperative that clinical assessment and intervention be done in a timely manner. This course opened my eyes to the mental health problems of Cystic Fibrosis (CF) patients and just how important it is to address them as swiftly as possible. If left untreated, it may interfere with the ability to effectively manage Cystic Fibrosis and may result in poor quality of life.

**Module 1: Depression & Anxiety in adults with CF**

This module does a good job discussing clinical depression and anxiety in adolescents & adults, the major symptoms for both, and how they interfere with everyday living of patients with CF.

Clinical depression and anxiety are usually swept under the rug by many and oftentimes go undiagnosed. This is dangerous because if left untreated, this can cause patients to have poor adherence to prescribed medications and less frequent clinic attendance, higher healthcare costs, and earlier mortality.1

I understood just how important it is to treat a patient by focusing on their health AND well-being which encompasses the physical and mental health challenges that develop in people with Cystic Fibrosis or any chronic illness for that matter. This is a disease that lives with you and you need to be in a good mental place to actively fight it on a daily basis.

The international mental health screening guidelines in CF serve as the foundation for globally assessing the presence of mental health difficulties in people with CF, as well as recognizing the most effective treatment recommendations and interventions based on the severity of the mental health symptoms. This includes knowing how to assess the existence of suicide ideation or other safety issues, as well as how to conduct risk evaluations and safety planning if needed.

**Module 2: Emotional Wellness in children with CF under age 12**

There are several prevalent disorders that manifest in children under the age of 12. Some of these include ADHD, ASD, depression, anxiety, and ODD etc.1 These disorders can be distinguished from standardized milestones that children meet at appropriate stages of life and can be diagnosed through clinical assessments which are prompted by screening routinely.1

Evidence-based behavioural and psychological therapy treatment, school-based modifications, changes in medical care delivery, and, in some situations, psychopharmacologic management can all help to alleviate distressing symptoms and functional impairment.

Avoidance and early identification of mental health disorders in children with cystic fibrosis allows for the establishment of a foundation for lifelong wellness.

**Module 3: Procedural Anxiety & Distress**

Procedural anxiety is defined as concern or worry about any kind of medical procedure that may interfere with one's capacity to receive adequate medical care.2 I found this module extremely enjoyable as I learned a lot about different intervention techniques that can be used to reduce procedural anxiety. Things such as comfort positioning, like a mother hugging her child or age-appropriate interventions, like giving a toy to an infant or having adolescents listen to music, use guided imagery, or progressive muscle relaxation etc.1

There are several personal, physical and healthcare risk factors that can be associated with procedural anxiety such as perceived lack of control, sleep deprivation, and strained relationship with the medical team etc.1 Hence, it’s vital that all members of the healthcare team actively listen to the concerns of patients regarding procedural anxiety. Whether it’s an infant, adolescent, or an adult, everyone has anxiety when awaiting any medical, dental, or surgical procedure. The medical team must promptly identify the severity of the anxiety so it can be addressed accordingly.

I believe that one of the most important things a healthcare provider can do is to get patients to increase their self-management and coping skills which can aid them in the future. Having a high self-efficacy can help change a patient’s perspective on stressful situations. This module is great for that reason as it goes in-depth about the importance of having a Procedural Plan and having patients of all ages improve their anxiety levels by following it and gradually adapting to whatever procedures they may have to go through.

**Module 4: Substance misuse**

This module was probably the one I had a bit of trouble comprehending and this was because of the various medical treatment options for the substances people tend to take which can affect the respiratory system, like alcohol, marijuana, opioids, and inhalation drugs.1

Adolescence is frequently a time when substance abuse begins, and CF patients must be aware of the health consequences, screening interventions, and treatment choices in order to improve their health outcomes. Substance usage can also have an impact on a patient's eligibility for aggressive life-saving procedures like transplantation. It is critical for CF care teams to notice substance use in their patients and families and be willing to offer counselling and referrals to treatment if necessary.1

**Module 5: Caregiver & Family Resilience**

This was probably my favourite module alongside procedural anxiety. Having a good support network has a positive impact on the mental health of patients which allows them to face the daily challenges of fighting a chronic disease. Resilience is defined as the process and result of successfully adjusting to harsh or difficult living situations, particularly through flexibility in thought, behaviour, and emotions and adjustment to external and internal pressures.3

A variety of factors influence how successfully people adapt to adversity, with one of the most significant one being social relationships. People with Cystic Fibrosis, whether it is the child or the parent, need to have a support network to help lighten their load and develop their resilience skills. Parents with CF children need to have their stress addressed or else it may impact parent-child relationship and can lead to tasks not being performed well, poor decision-making, and burnout etc.1 Likewise, parents with CF who need to take care of their children must balance parenthood while keeping health, undergoing treatments, and dealing with illness. Providers can give education on how this can be done in daily life and via communication.

CF care teams play a huge role in building resilience and strength in families. Screening for the social determinants of health can assist in addressing the things that are affecting health outcomes. One of the major things to address, in my opinion, is the barriers to accessing healthcare, stressors, and economic instability etc. Whatever barriers CF patients have need to be addressed first if improved lifestyle is to be achieved.

**What have I taken away from this?**

Overall, this course gave me a lot to think about and made me realize just how necessary it is to keep patients mental health positive in order for them to fight their chronic disease every day. Social support networks and family are the backbone for fostering positive health behaviours which can help counter substance misuse, suicidal ideations, depression and anxiety. I learned various skills on the positioning of patients to reduce procedural anxiety during medical and surgical procedures. I didn’t have any trouble understanding most of the material in all 5 modules of this course and enjoyed most of what I read.

**References**

1. IU Login: Indiana University - Stale Request. idp.login.iu.edu. Accessed March 31, 2024. <https://iu.instructure.com/courses/2027870/pages/course-five-introduction?module_item_id=25066253>

‌ 2. Procedural Anxiety | Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. www.cff.org. <https://www.cff.org/managing-cf/procedural-anxiety>

3. American Psychological Association. Resilience. *American Psychological Association*. [https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience. Published May 2022](https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience.%20Published%20May%202022).