Observations of Change in One Family

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Murray Bowen M.D.
(1913-1990)

“The kind of people we are is determined largely by the character of our relationship with others.”
Evolutionary mechanisms redistributing anxiety

In family systems we can observe the way people interact, influences the brain’s pathways

Two systems for perceiving and behaving:

- **Automatic - fast track thinking** – Reactive based on past sensitivities to experiences.
  - Examples: make the problem person behave, your are to blame, stop, do this……

- **Slow track thinking** - self regulate, stay separate…
We see a Tree

But not the forest or the mechanism for growth.
Bowen Theory Assumption: The Family is a System/Unit

- Anxiety is redistributed in a system.

- One person absorbs more anxiety, or is more vulnerable:
  - This person has lost the ability to solve problems. Others or institutions begin to tell them what to do.

- Automatic mechanisms manage anxiety:
  - Reactive behavior - give up self by fusing with the other, fight, run, blame others, go crazy, or get sick.
  - Define a self while staying connected to others.
Observe and then Develop a Learning Space with Others

1) Fearful interactions can be toned down by focusing on self, using humor and reversals to create a space for the other.

2) NeurCare, after conversations, allows for integration of both cognitive and physiological information.

3) Videotape interactions keeps observations as the main point of research on self and understanding others.
Functions of Symptoms in the Relationship System

- Symptoms absorb anxiety, some do better and others become isolated.
- Reduce anxiety by having calmer contact.
- Relationships can be thought of as people being on a fixed seesaws.
Listening & Following or Be Out of Sync

- How to be a separate self while holding others responsible, and without telling them what to do?
  - Use of paradoxical statements and reversals: Think outside the stimulus response world.
  - Holding people responsible.
  - “This is what I would do if I were you, which I am not, at lest not yet.”

- Learn from mistakes have fun.
You can't control a whole damn family...

but you can control you, and anytime you can control you, the family is a healthier organism. That is a reason to become a self.

The more you can become a self, the more to your advantage, and the families.

~ Murray Bowen, M.D.
Overview of Manic Depressive Diagnosis in Nuclear Family

- Diagnosis correlated with the serious illness or deaths of significant family members.

- 1972-74 Maternal grandmother and mother died and I was divorced and both my brothers were diagnosed with manic depressive symptoms.

- Problems seen on reflection:
  - cut off from the extended family
  - increasing anxiety in nuclear family
  - limited knowledge about family emotional process
One Small Forest- Family as a Unit

The Maloney- Maher Family

AJM 1909-67

AMS 1941

WMM, 1943

AMS

M.40 -S.49 & 52

d.71

d.77

WMM, 1943

d.74

d.71

d.77

AJM, Jr. 1950

AWM, 1918-74

d.72

d.64
The Mutigenerational Pattern

- 2005 Paternal Uncle Jimmy Maloney dies
- April 2006 Uncle Jimmy’s birthday, Drew becomes manic
- Family members panic and call me to do something!
Generations

- Father d. 67, Marie d. 58, Leo d. 76, Betty d. 78

[Family tree diagram with individuals and photos]
Initial Strategy:

- Contact family members to organize greater contact

- Two first cousins volunteered to help.
  - Charles Crone was in Williamsburg and believed in the medical model. He took responsibility to take Drew to physicians. Drew was hospitalized May, 2006.
  
  - Liz Eitt offered her family farm as a meeting place for Drew, his wife Margie and me, where we could begin to understand how to better deal with one another.
Breaking Pattern of Isolation

- Principle: 50/50 – You do something for me and I will do something for you.
  - Financial help for taking difficult action.
    - Move out of house, have teeth fixed, apply for disability,
    - We will buy you a trailer
  - Come to Liz’s farm follow the rules:
    - no smoking in the house, shower, exercise, NeuroCare
    - We will pay bills until you get disability.
Breaking Patterns using NeuroCare

- Neurofeedback training breaks up chaotic, old patterns in the brain.
  - Interrupt - Every 20 seconds: Alert - Relax
- Feedback enables the brain to see its own functioning.
- Brain see association between chaos or non-awareness and awareness and relaxation.
- Brain itself seeks comfortable new patterns.
Pre Eastern State – 11 sessions
4 months - 2006

- 5/16 06, 5/17, 5/24, 5/25, 6/19, 6/20, 6/25, 7/14, 7/15, 8/15, 8/16
- Initial drug treatment did not clear up his functioning.
- Added Seroquel in June and his shaking began.
- Hospitalized 3 times for 3 to 5 days.
- Admitted to emergency rooms twice for drug reactions.
  - Eastern State Hospital - August till Oct 10,
  - Father died there 1967.
Butch visits his brother Drew at Eastern State Hospital August to October 2006

Lost 30 ponds- developed Parkinson's like symptoms
Stage two - Drew is Released from Eastern State

- Letter to head of Eastern State
  - Noting possible drug issues
  - Drew’s father had died at Eastern State in 1967 when he was about Drew’s age
  - Developed aftercare plan by Liz and Mark

- 14 Zengar session after Drew stopped shaking for a moment involuntarily after the 10/12/06 session.
  - A profound turning point.
After Five Hospitalizations the Zen Farm Becomes a Learning Space

- After 5 weeks in the state hospital Drew came to Zen farm. He had two short Neurofeedback sessions per day while others had one.

- People surrounding my brother, including me, first had to learned to act as if we were not afraid for or of my brother.
  - Untrained people from the community were also involved.
Establishing warmth when there has been confusion and distance.
Stage three – 22 sessions, one year and 3 months 2007 and 2008

● Minor problems and consistent follow up

● Total sessions: 47 sessions
  – May and June 2008 Margie: uterus removed and knee replacement surgery.
    ● Drew lost his job at the golf course.
    ● Drew began to work part time at his brothers T shirt shop.
AMS Neurofeedback Training:

- 2005 - 16 session - Ten sessions before purchasing the equipment in August 2005 and 6 session on my equipment.
- 2006 - 11 sessions
- 2007 – 18 sessions 7 sessions on my equipment and ten on others.
- 2008 – 16 session
- total - 61 sessions
Evidence of Change

- Shift in alliances and less symptom focus.
  - Drew became more functional his wife developed physical problems.

- They have essentially remained free of emotional problems.
  - Drew remains on Deprocote, Lithium and Synthroid for a thyroid disorder
The more rigid patterns in a family system, the more disturbed. Flexibility allows for individuals to change one at a time.
Conclusions

- I was willing to take many unpopular stands based on my experience and my interpretation of theory.

- Neurofeedback enable people to interact calmly and to reflect on experiences.

- People reported being able to see their impact on others and how anxiety functioned in relationships.
The Zen Farm Could be a Model

- Weekends with family members
  - Three generational patterns
  - Emotional tone in interactions
  - Ongoing issues

Neurofeedback for everyone
  Reduce anxiety, cognitive restructuring, be more in the moment and aware.