

Book review

Motivational interviewing in diabetes care

By MP Steinberg and WR Miller. New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2015

Why don't people just do as they are told? Few conditions are associated with such a complex array of lifestyle and medical treatment issues as is diabetes. It would make everyone's life a lot easier if people just lost some weight, did some exercise and stopped eating unhealthy food (sic). Unfortunately, for various reasons this doesn't seem to work very well and the guilty outpatient commitments soon evaporate when individuals are back in the real world.

Chronic disease management has long suffered from the physician-centric model of disease, in which paternalistic dictat doesn't translate very well into behavioural change. People with diabetes often struggle to make healthy choices and stay on top of managing their illness. Arguably, it is traditionally presumed that patients don't change because either they don't know enough or they don't care enough. For meaningful, long-term changes to occur, we desperately need to focus on tailored self-management and overcoming the barriers to change when it comes to issues such as eating habits, physical activity, medication use, insulin treatment, substance misuse and psychological issues.

Marc P Steinberg and William R Miller, the authors of the very interesting textbook, *Motivational interviewing in diabetes care*, have the knowledge and experience required to explore how new approaches to problem solving can be applied and can work effectively for a range of problems relating to self-management of diabetes. They have developed a form of motivational interviewing – a refined form of guiding or a particular way of having a conversation about change – that is designed to strengthen the patient's own motivations and commitment to change and to help them to argue for change on their own behalf rather than persisting with an external locus of control. The authors demonstrate several useful counselling techniques that can make any conversation with a patient more effective and motivating.

One might suggest that this form of persuasion is on the spectrum of coercion, brainwashing or neuro-linguistic programming. However, the authors argue that this is not a

way of tricking patients into doing what you want them to do, but rather a way of harnessing people's natural motivations for health, change and positive behaviours – for example, getting people to do the things they already know they should be doing but can't, such as stopping smoking or recycling.

The four processes of motivational interviewing are:

- > engaging, which requires an understanding of the patient's point of view as a way to develop a working alliance with them
- > focusing, the process of developing one or more clear goals for change
- > evoking, calling forth the patient's own motivation for, and ideas about, change
- > planning, which involves the collaborative development of the next steps that the individual is willing to take.

Ultimately, any formats in which we can have more meaningful conversations are very welcome, but the problem is how to get all this done within the short consultation time that we have available. We can all feel time-pressured. Steinberg and Miller argue, however, that motivational interviewing is not an extended counselling process, and one of the surprises is that research shows how often and well it has worked in relatively brief contacts. One of the core concepts of motivational interviewing is that it should be the patient rather than the healthcare provider who should be voicing the arguments for change. We therefore should restrain our ingrained approach to be action-oriented problem solvers and become more reflective listeners instead.

This thoughtful book is a helpful and well-written introduction (not just for diabetes specialists) to the essence of motivational interviewing into your routine practice. It is rather American in tone and attitude, but that is no bad thing, and it shows how and why the errors in approach that we classically make are repeated and reinforced and can be overcome. This book is well worth a look to help to challenge and improve your practice. ■

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