

Overview of Individual Meaning-Centered Psychotherapy (IMCP)

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Origins of IMCP

- Developed by Dr. William Breitbart and Psychiatric Oncology team at MSK.
- Individual and group formats as well as other applications
- RCTs: Increased spiritual well-being, enhanced overall QOL, reduced physical symptom distress, reduced anxiety, and desire for hastened death
- Evidence-based practice

D=S-M

“Despair is suffering without meaning”

-Viktor Frankl

Despair in Advanced Illness

- Desire for hastened death
- Suicidal Ideation
- Loss of meaning/spiritual well-being
- Hopelessness
- Loss of Dignity
- Demoralization
- Depression/Anxiety/Panic

Perspective on Nature of Human Existence

- Humans are uniquely aware of their existence
- Meaning-making is the defining characteristic of human beings as a species
- Connection/Connectedness
- Capacity for transformation

Illness and Meaning

Illness

- Suffering
- Limitations
- Identity
- Death
- Guilt

May Lead to

- Enhance Meaning
- Maintain Meaning
- Loss of Meaning

Spirituality

- Faith:
 - Belief in a higher transcendent power
 - Not necessarily defined as God
 - Not necessarily through practice of religion
- External or internal locus

Spirituality (cont.)

- Meaning: Having a sense that one's life has meaning:
 - Experience of fulfilling a unique role and purpose
 - Responsibility to live to one's full potential
 - Realize a sense of peace, contentment or even transcendence through connectedness with something greater than one's self

Research and Importance of Meaning in Advanced Illness

- Sense of spirituality and connectedness to meaning in life shown by research to be protective factor in patients with advanced cancer
 - Enhanced sense of wellbeing
 - Reduced depression, hopelessness, anxiety, desire for hastened death
 - Improved coping with symptoms

Basic Concepts

- Based on the work of Viktor Frankl
- Life has meaning and never ceases to have meaning
- Will to meaning – The need to find meaning in human existence is a primordial motivation for human behavior
- Freedom of will – to find meaning in existence and to choose one's attitude towards suffering; to choose how we respond to uncertainty

Sources of Meaning in IMCP

- Creativity – work, deeds, causes
- Experience – nature, art, relationships
- Attitude – the attitude taken towards suffering and existential issues, limitations, uncertain future
- Historical – Individual, family, community history; Legacy: past, present, future

Structure and Process of MCP

- Individual format is seven sessions
- Each session focuses on a specific topic and theme related to sources of meaning
- Sessions are both didactic and experiential
- “Homework” assignments are given to write or at least reflect on the following session’s experiential exercise question
- Patient is encouraged to complete “legacy project” by the end of the intervention, if they wish

Session Topics and Themes

- Session #1: Concepts & Sources of Meaning
 - Intro to meaning and IMCP; Cancer(Illness) Story
- Session #2: Cancer (Illness) & Meaning
 - Identity – Before and after dx
- Session #3: Historical Sources of Meaning
 - Life as a Living Legacy
- Session #4: Attitudinal Sources of Meaning
 - Encountering Life's Limitations
- Creative Sources of Meaning
 - Actively Engaging in Life
- Session #6: Experiential Sources of Meaning
 - Connecting with Life
- Session #7: Transitions
 - Reflections & Hopes for the Future

Session #1 Concepts and Sources of Meaning

- Meaningful Moments

List one or two experiences or moments when life has felt particularly meaningful to you – whether it sounds powerful or mundane. For example, it could be something that helped you through a difficult day, a time when you felt most alive.

Session #2 Cancer & Meaning

#1 Think about a time just before your diagnosis. Write down 4 answers to the question “who am I?” These can be positive or negative, and include personality characteristics, body image, beliefs, things you do, people you know, etc...for example, might start with “I am someone who____,” or “I am a _____” ...

#2 Take a moment to think about how has cancer affected your answers. Are your answers the same? How has cancer affected the things that are most meaningful to you?

Session #3 Historical Sources of Meaning

#1: When you look back on your life and upbringing, what are the most significant events, memories, relationships, traditions, etc., that have made the greatest impact on who you are today? For example, identify specific memories of how you were raised that have made a lasting impression on your life (e.g., your relationship with parents, siblings, friends teachers, etc.,). Sometimes the origin of your name is a meaningful key to your family's legacy. What is the origin of your name?

Session #3 Historical Sources of Meaning (cont.)

#2 Legacy You Live and Will Give

As you reflect upon who you are today, what are the meaningful activities, roles or accomplishments that you are most proud of?

As you look toward the future, what are some of the life-lessons you have learned along the way that you would want to pass on to others? What is the legacy you hope to live and give?

Session #4 Attitudinal Sources of Meaning

#1. What are some the life limitations, losses, or obstacles you have faced in the past, and how did you cope or deal with them at that time?

#2. Since your diagnosis, what are specific limitations or losses you have faced, and how are you dealing with them now? Are you still able to find meaning in your daily life despite your awareness of the limitations and finiteness of life?

Session #4 Attitudinal Sources of Meaning (cont.)

#3. What would you consider a “good” or “meaningful” death? How can you imagine being remembered by your loved ones? (e.g., what are some of your personal characteristics, the shared memories, or meaningful life events that have made a lasting impression on them?)

Session #5 Creative Sources of Meaning

#1. Living Life and being creative requires courage and commitment. Can you think of time(s) when you've been courageous, taken ownership of your life, or made a meaningful commitment to something of value to you?

#2. Do you feel you've expressed what is most meaningful to you through your life's work and creative activities (e.g. Job, parenting, hobbies, causes)? If so, how?

Session #5 Creative Sources of Meaning (cont.)

#3. What are your responsibilities? Who are you responsible to and for?

#4. Do you have unfinished business? What tasks have you always wanted to do, but have yet to undertake? If so, what do you think is holding you back?

Session 6 Experiential Sources of Meaning

List three ways in which you connect with life and feel most alive the experiential sources of Love, beauty, and humor (three examples each)

Session #7 Transitions

#1. What has it been like for you to go through this learning experience over these last seven sessions? Have there been any changes in the way you view your life and cancer experience having been through this process?

#2. Do you feel like you have a better understanding of the sources of meaning in life and you able to use them in your daily life? If so, how?

Session #7 Transitions (cont.)

#3. What are your hopes for the future?

MCP-PC in Hospice/PC

- Challenges:
 - Symptom burden
 - Cognitive impairment
 - Hospital/facility environment
 - Privacy
 - Time

Example of Condensed Structure and Topics – MCP-PC

- Session 1: Experiencing Meaning
 - Experiential Exercises:
 - Meaningful Moments
 - Cancer(illness) and Meaning
 - Your History and Meaning

Example of Condensed Structure and Topics – MCP-PC

- Session 2: Sources of Meaning
 - Experiential Exercises:
 - Encountering Life's Limitations
 - Creativity, Courage, and Responsibility
 - Connecting to Life

Example of Condensed Structure and Topics – MCP-PC

- Session 3: Connecting with Meaning
 - Experiential Exercises:
 - Finding a Sense of Peace
 - Legacy – What You Leave Behind
 - Reflecting on Meaning

MCP-PC in Practice

- Increased flexibility
- Simplification and repetition
- Supporting authentic reactions and emotional expression
- Focus on meaning in the present
- Address suffering

Final Points and Summary

- Importance of therapist's belief in ever-present potential for experience of meaning
- Structured flexibility
- Assessment of loss of meaning vs. depression in the medical environment
- Identifying patients appropriate for IMCP
- Psychoeducational and experiential format for enhancing meaning and purpose in those with advanced illness.

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