

Debility, Debilitation, Morbidity and Psychiatric diseases

By Benjamin Wagener on Wednesday, February 19th 2014.

I think it is necessary first to recall the meaning of those terms for which I give some personal definitions:

Debility: The disability to understand things properly, to reach proper goals and its medical counterparts.

Debilitation: The fact to turn to some degree of debility or to be turned to some degree of debility.

Morbidity: Linked to debility. The state or fact to be unable to understand and reach the proper goals and meanings of Life.

Psychiatric Disease: A state of psychology and mind that expresses and signifies some dysfunction with respect to the normal and natural functioning of a person.

It seems that there is something recurrent with respect to the dual action of morbidity and debility in psychiatric diseases. Moreover, this recurrence is especially embarrassing in psychiatry when the symptoms of some illnesses while expressing a dysfunction and problem may be reduced by making a person less intelligent in order to be unable to express the problems through the symptoms and as a result may make a person unable to recover with the intelligence that both make the symptoms expressed and would permit recovering.

This is something very unclear in psychiatry, that the symptoms expressed are also the expression of a being trying to recover. Lowering those symptoms is something but I think it is very important to understand that somehow those symptoms are positive things which are really completely different from the illness itself or from the medical problem. In psychiatry, symptoms are important things that must be understood, it is Medicine to cure some illnesses whereas it is bad psychiatry to try to cure symptoms. Understanding where the illness is hidden and what it is below the expression of symptoms is the key point of which to concentrate on followed by the search for a cure.

Moreover, it seems very important to insist on the fact that many mentally ill persons may be impacted in their ability to have their own personal normal life and that this disability that may be inherent to the person or that a person may suffer from because of its

environment may cause the symptoms. It also seems important to understand because of the period of time it has lasted so in Psychiatry that symptoms are clearly normal and natural expressions of a problem. It may seem somewhat exaggerated to say this because many medics would say “yes I know”, but the problem is that it is lasting so long in Psychiatry that it is something still very unclear.

Nevertheless, it remains true that there is some cognitive counterpart in psychiatric diseases in the cognitive disability for a person to be able to understand and manage some problems by him/herself. This is something true even if the environment has a lot of influence on many of us and that in some circumstances the environment may be so to cause some illnesses for a person in a situation where the problem is the environment and not the person who nevertheless may become ill because of it. This is something we can see very easily with respect to stress. Stress is a natural and normal reaction to the environment or an event, however, can cause a lot of trouble to someone and cause an illness and sometimes a severe illness. It has even been experienced that some isolated animals on a beautiful isle with all they needed in order to develop were finally extinguished because they became too numerous which caused them too much stress.

This ambiguity about the causes of the illness is also something important to take into account in Psychiatry. A person that is ill because of some event or environment should not be centered as the problem or as having a problem him/herself when the problem is not truly due to him or her. It is indeed a clear matter of fact that we are vulnerable medically as well from a physical point of view as from a psychological point of view. When a person is ill because of external reasons, first it seems necessary to understand that this illness is due to the environment or an event and then has to do also with this external disturbance. And I make a serious warning about it because in such situation making a person as the center of the problem can only make the illness more acute whereas it is very clear that in any situation of psychological trouble or mental disease, the inner relationship of a patient with his environment should be considered with seriousness.

On the other hand, it seems clear that there is a close link between cognitive impairment and mental trouble even if, as said, we are all vulnerable to some extent. Some diseases may be interior and even genetic but this may be far from the majority of diseases. For a lot of diseases that have been considered as “grave” in the past, we can now see real improvement as well as some recovering. This is something that means that the true causes of the disease were not determined. This is something I would like to insist about.

In any area of Sciences and as Medicine is a part of Sciences looking for the reasons, understanding and explanations of phenomena is a main prerogative. For medics it should be the same and a good psychiatrist should not look for just trying to lower symptoms, to classify vaguely someone as having such or such an abstract illness with no precise meaning or by that way try to cure such an abstract disease that the patient would not have anyway, but a good psychiatrist should normally look very carefully at the reasons of the disorder and

fix it with efficiency. This is something simple to understand and this could be done quite easily in practice.

Moreover, it was one of the purposes to put “debilitation” into light in this text because it may be clearly linked to the appearance of a disorder and to its worsening. Morbid symptoms are not enough to explain or justify some disorders, some cognitive part has to be looked for in the inherent debility that such mental state implies. The disability to deal with morbid signifiers by oneself and the disability to recover a normal healthy mental state has obviously something to do with some cognitive disability and with the cognitive learning process it involves. Not to say at all that mentally ill persons are debilitated to some extent, it remains nevertheless that something in the cognition is impaired for some reasons that may be very diverse.

The problem for example with lowering symptoms is that very often the way used to reduce these symptoms is to make a patient less intelligent. Symptoms express in some way and some reasons that should be understood and well managed by the medical surroundings that should take these symptoms and the patient by the hand in order to make him/her evolve and recover. Simply lowering symptoms may have some very obvious effects that some may see as a positive effect of the medical job but it may be by no way a manner to truly help a patient and lead him/her to reestablishment. This is also something that should be understood that by concentrating on lowering symptoms one may make a patient unable to recover. If there is some trouble, symptoms express the problem. This expression can be very large, various, bizarre, delusive and of course different from one person to another but please do not make a patient unable to express the only way he/she may have to express the presence of a problem and to make this problem understandable. From this point of view moreover it seems clear that a good understanding of symptoms and of the way they work and express are the main clue (if any) that can allow some good medical management to take place. Therefore lowering symptoms is something but one has to know that it is somehow a dangerous road (but very often taken) which may do nothing for the real medical question in presence and that moreover may make a person unable to be cured.

We are not so different from one another. A patient and a Psychiatrist are indeed very close as well biologically as mentally but we are both very sensitive and strong people that can be subjected to some trouble that sometimes may appear as strange or “crazy” but that can in many cases be understood as normal. Once the proper link is made with the real problem, only then a cure becomes possible. This is something that is important to understand and that goes beyond current Medicine.