The Sick role and illness behavior

Dr Radwan Banimustafa
MD,MRCPsych,DPM
2008
Definitions

• Disease refer to objective physiological or mental disorder at the organic level and confined to the individual organism.

• Illness is a subjective state, a psychological awareness of dysfunction at the personal level also confined to the individual.
Sick role derived its meaning from Parson’s concept and it refers to a state of social dysfunction, a social role assumed by the individual that is variously specified according to the expectations of a given society, it extends beyond the person to include relation with others.

Illness behavior is the behavior of a person in the sick role.
Sick role involves

- Exemption from normal social responsibilities and other people are expected to take over duties.
- Is not expected to get well without being taken care of.
- Has an obligation to want to get well and seek appropriate medical help.
- Other people are under obligation to be kind and sympathetic to.
Illness behavior involves:

- Much of it is a result or associated with the recognized disease.
- Some are generated by the fear of disease or the positive rewards and support provided for a person in the sick role.
- Some times a person may adopt the sick role and illness behavior without having illness or may show illness behavior which is out of proportion to the degree of illness.
- Behaving normally in the presence of undiagnosed illness.
A basic principle in learning theory is that patterns of behavior which are rewarded tend to increase in frequency.

It is not surprising that not all who consult doctors with somatic symptoms have objective evidence of disease.

Probably these have been trained to do so under stress since childhood.
• To put it in the simplest form, the sick role is attractive, and so it is liable to be adopted whenever its advantages and disadvantages outweigh those of health.

• Different people adopt the sick role according to their coping ability, or to get a secondary gain.
THANK YOU