

Naomi's Clinical Column from the Spring 2016 Newsletter

Does psychiatric terminology apply to the very old human being in the final Resolution struggle of life?

Psychiatric Evaluation: Molly Thomas, age 85, is suffering from delusional symptoms. She is accusing her male caregiver of raping her. Her paranoid delusions often extend to the male physical therapist who sees her once each week, insisting that he is stealing her clothes. Her daughter claims that Mrs. T. has always been "extremely proper and puritanical," never mentioning sexual matters." I have prescribed Mellaril and distraction to dilute her delusional state.

Physical Diagnosis: Alzheimer's Dementia, Osteoarthritis, Vascular disturbance. Mrs. T. has complained of dizziness. Her caregiver claims that she is increasingly restless.

Validation Worker's report: I have been seeing Mrs. T. for one hour for the past three months. Since receiving Mellaril, an anti-psychotic medication, her accusations have increased.



Social History: Molly T. is the oldest of three children. Her parents emigrated to the U.S. from Germany in 1936, when Mrs. T. was 6 years old. Mrs. T. cared for her two brothers while her mother worked in a shoe factory. Her father, according to Mrs. T., was very strict. She never dated, and was forced to marry at age 16 to a man 22 years older.

Current Situation: Her brother, Joseph, died two months ago. Her youngest brother lives 300 miles away and she never sees him. Since the medication has not helped, the psychiatrist has agreed to stop the medication while I tried Validation. Here is an example and a summary of our contacts and some of the Validation Techniques that I used during the past three months:

Mrs. T.: Did you see that hairy young man?

Validation Worker: (Using the Preferred Sense, Centering, and Empathizing with Mrs. T's fear) "What does he look like?"

Mrs. T.: He has big hands, and sometimes, he has no clothes on, and his "thing" is so big. (Her voice trembles with fear, as she gestures, describing the size of his penis.)

Validation Worker: (feeling Mrs. T's fear, establishing trust, rephrasing with empathy) "Is it that big?"

Mrs. T.: nods, her eyes fill with tears. They share a moment of silence. Mrs. T. takes the Validation worker's hands and cries, silently.

Each week, Mrs. T. shares her fears with the Validation worker, who listens with empathy and helps her express her anger and fear. The caregiver and physical therapist report, after three months of Validation, that Mrs. T.'s accusations have lessened. She often jokes with them calling them, "good boys after all."

Mrs. T. is not cured of her fear and anger at men, but her feelings have lessened considerably. She has not accused the men of hurting or robbing her for the past four months. I have taught her daughter the Validation techniques that have helped.

Validation Theory: When a very old person, who has lost clock time, returns to the past, and substitutes a person in present time, for someone in the past, they have entered the final “Resolution Struggle.” We do not call this a “delusion,” rather a struggle to resolve unfinished issues and express emotions that have been suppressed for a lifetime.

An important **Validation Principle:** “When deep feelings are expressed, and validated, the feelings subside and the old person is relieved.” The very old person in this final Resolution Struggle is trying to heal. The Validation Worker may never know what happened to Mrs. T., but the worker does know that she never expressed her fear of sex and her anger at the man who hurt her. In old age, Mrs. T. is struggling to ease her hurt and pain in order to live and die in peace.