

Original Paper

Delusions, Maslows Hierarchy and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

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Personal growth can be very therapeutic when living with a mental illness and can mean getting life back to normal. Paranoid delusions can prevent our growth in every way as it is outlined by Maslow but with cognitive behavioural therapy these problem can be overcome.

This can open the door to much that is pleasurable in life with schizophrenia and allows us to go onto be able to make the most of what life in the mental health system has to offer including when in hospital, life at day centres and sheltered accommodation.

By accessing things like friendship and mastering new skills we can add to the benefits of developing insight and will become more resilient and functional with life with the illness. I believe personal growth should be taught in all the institutions of the mental health system.

The account then explains what has happened in my therapy and how it works to achieve these goals in terms of gradual improvement, a virtuous circle of being functional and ways that insight can be combined to make ourselves more and more resilient.

So to begin delusions can prevent climbing the Maslow Tree in a number of ways:

Tier One: Being frightened can prevent our ability to care for ourselves in that we may be too frightened to eat and fear can sap our strength to look after ourselves and impair our motivation to look after ourselves such as having to shower or do the housework.

This can get us into a right state where the rubbish I spiled up in the kitchen and the washing up is not done and the lack of personal hygiene might result in smelling and spreading germs and infections.

Sooner or later this is going to be noticed by friends and family who will contact mental health services and may result in being readmitted to hospital.

Once there you will have warmth and shelter but maybe too frightened to eat so you need to calm down first and the privations of not being able to look after yourself have to be answered not through support but overcoming the fear.

Tier two,

Being frightened about being responsible for 9/11 you have to get away from people who might find out about it by reading your mind or through the surveillance that many schizophrenics feel that they are being spied on. This might mean getting away from the spying by going off into the wilderness to get away from everyone which can leave you without basic needs like warmth and shelter.

Voices can be heard here that remind you something terrible is going to happen to you for having killed all those people and this can combine with your delusions and make you even more frightened.

The main answer to this even when in hospital is to calm down and that might mean a Valium but these are rarely prescribed. The only other ways of dealing with the fear at level two is by confronting the fear is to overcome it or distract yourself but this is easier said than done, even with safe place imagery or breathing exercises. Although in some cases they might help you climb the Maslow tree.

Tier 3 Emotion,

Feeling you are responsible for an atrocity for 9/11 is very emotionally painful and with voices criticising you for having done something terribly wrong can make you emotionally numb and stop you experiencing normal emotional feeling which might have been very therapeutic.

The voices can inflict a lot of emotional pain here too and as their criticism about feeling a bad person can cause a lot of emotional pain. Voices can last all day long so the chances of soothing this through insight can be very limited.

For insight to stand any chance we need a way to stand up to the voices and challenge what they are saying but experiencing delusions can make this difficult as they are still there despite what the voices are saying.

During periods where the voices are quiet we may focus on the delusions more so and at these times the delusions can be questioned and at these times we can stand up to the voice once we have some insight. We can begin to develop some emotional strength to stand up to fear and pain of both symptoms which will allow more time to develop some further insight.

Tier 4 Esteem,

Thinking I have killed all those people makes me feel morally worthless and hearing voices criticising me for it once again doubles up the problem. Once we begin to have the time and ability to look at ourselves inwardly we can realise we have good qualities so that we can be compassionate about ourselves and feel better about things.

This is essential because even if we believe we have good qualities that won't make up for what we believed to have caused 9/11 but being compassionate can soothe this and feel better about ourselves and from here we can build on any insight.

Tier 5 Self-actualisation,

The problem at this level is that it is difficult to come to terms with yourself believing you have killed all those people you are frightened of who you really are. Insight into ourselves can mean we are not really capable of perpetrating such atrocities and so we can question the delusion.

Furthermore if we can be who we are we can be a lot happier with our lives and with ourselves and can achieve some balance and harmony in our lives and this can be therapeutic when we have serious mental health problems

Tier six

Killing all those people stops you experiencing pleasure as it the case of peak experience but if we have insight we can be more emotionally engaged and enjoy what life has to offer more so the chances of reaching peak experiences are greatly enhanced.

The Role of Insight

The answer to all this might be to develop some insight...

The symptoms of schizophrenia can overwhelm us and make us totally depressed but with insight we can step back from what we are thinking and distance ourselves from our thoughts so that we can remember our good points and challenge the feelings of worthlessness.

Steeping back can also remember who we are and reengage ourselves emotionally so that we have some insight into the strength and knowledge to further challenge the delusion that we have perpetrated 9/11 and that we are not capable of such an atrocity as we are basically loving and caring people...

Insight can make us receptive to the positive reinforcement that can make us feel better about ourselves
Insight can open us up to the emotional support and feeling stronger emotionally might give us the strength to cope with the illness make us feel like evaluable human beings like emphasising our good points and off loading the pressure we feel emotionally. Once we begin to calm down we can become more self-aware and can introspect our good point which can help our self-esteem and know our true identity so we can regain our self-actualisation. Enjoying all of this scan help with our peak experience.

Hospital

The depression caused by schizophrenia can be cheered up emotionally and make us more receptive to the family/affiliative role of nurses in hospital.

It should destress us which might help prevent stress induced schizophrenia.

It might help with making new friends as at day centres which again can further the source of emotional strength and open the door to many things that can help climb the maslow tree.

Emotional contact in hospital can make it seem less asteer and cheer us up and make us feel more motivated to pursue the activities on offer as it can with day centres.

Insight if it taught in hospital might make us more motivated to look after ourselves psychically and calm us down enough to eat and give us the strength to look after ourselves.

Instead of being left to watch the television we can talk to the other patients and share our experiences with each other as we are all experts by experience.

It could be felt that we are living in an institution when in hospital but if we practice insight we might be able to enjoy some of the activities and help available provided we are not in there for too long.

Feeling emotionally stronger and more cheery might give us strength to confront the symptoms and could aid recovery so that the length of the admission is not so long which is important because too long a stay could feel like confinement.

Being calmed down can help us feel like we can wash and eat properly which has a positive impact on our mental health and the taste of food in hospital can be important therapeutically.

Personal growth should be practiced in hospital as it can be therapeutic against the acute symptoms of the illness and should not be all down to taking the medication.

Insight can help us realise we are not such bad people so we can be at more at ease with ourselves and this can give us time to rest and recuperate which during the acute phases of being in hospital can be extremely important.

At these times it is possible to engage with therapeutic conversation with the nurses and that can be very soothing so that we can make the best of the times in between the acute phases with the nurses. Having a chat over a cup of coffee or dosing something enjoyable can help with this too.

There isn't time on a ward with a lot of patients to spend a lot on one to one contact but with training for insight the patients could spend time talking to each other. That might make them more motivated to doing activity therapy for a while or get interested in the television.

Finding enjoyment in talking, activities or entertainment can act as a distraction from the symptoms of schizophrenia and help pass the time on the ward. Being bored just makes things worse as we dwell on our problems more and makes us less resilient to the illness.

Day Centres

Emotional contact in day centres can cheer us up to enjoying a lot of things in life despite the depression and feeling bad about ourselves because the voices are criticising us. Maslow is being taught in day centres and some cognitive insight would give it more of a chance for personal growth.

The more insight we have the more we engage emotionally the more we value things like friendship and we can esteem our good qualities as people and we don't feel so bad about ourselves when criticised by voices. If we value ourselves we can enjoy being ourselves and life will be a lot better despite the depression caused by voices and delusions and might induce a peak experience.

The conversation in hospital is supposed to be therapeutic and if someone is caring for us it can make us feel valued as human being despite critical voices and what the delusion thinking make it seem we are responsible for terrible things...

It doesn't mean just sharing our mental health problems as that is only the start of the therapeutic process but where there is some insight it leaves us free to talk about other things which can be more enjoyable. We can talk about other things in life which can lead us to a more normal existence so that we can live the same way as everyone else.

Many people with severe mental health problems experience symptoms most of the day but with insight we can reduce the frequency of the symptoms which is vital to our wellbeing as it allows us to concentrate on other things.

This means it is possible to have good periods to pursue activities that are fulfilling and can help with low mood when you know the frightening symptoms are going to reoccur. You have to make sure you make the good times are good as they can be before the next time of psychoses and that during the phases of being unwell you must try to remember with insight that they will pass.

Sheltered Accommodation

Emotional support in sheltered accommodation can help us cope with life better and might keep us out of hospital. If we calm down we might feel at home in the accommodation and derive some therapeutic benefit from it.

It open the door to spend some money on making our home as comfortable as possible and we can enjoy the surrounding a lot better.

This is important because where there is insight feeling that we have a sanctuary away from people spying on us there is a soothing effect that we can deal with the fear in our home environment.

Furthermore with the insight having a project worker on hand to keep reassuring us things are delusional can reinforce the feelings of safety and add to the therapy.

Insight can also help with getting out and about because if we feel we are spied on make us frightened to being around people and can prevent us from going to day centres. Again this might require some social support to reassure us thing are ok.

This can open the door to lots of essential activities as there is a need to go shopping for food and utilities and keep us as functional in these ways to keep us out of hospital and also by enjoying what life has to offer when out and about.

There are a limited number things one can do indoors and much of passing the time falls on electronic media to find something enjoyable in life. If we are too frightened to go out because of people spying on us (or in my case being watched by CIA informants) insight might help us watch the television even if we think our thoughts are being broadcast to everyone.

This is where sheltered accommodation comes into it own as if you are living with friends and staff members you can trust you are not left to be totally isolated and not engaging with the paranoid media doesn't matter.

If you are feeling paranoid they can talk you round as insight can be built upon through reassurances and questioning by someone you can trust and once you calm down the feelings of emotional involvement produced can cheer you up when the delusions are making you depressed.

What you have got to bear in mind with delusion is that where there is insight these feelings will pass and things will return to normal and that should act as a source of strength to get you through the worst

of it and again having someone on hand to reassure you things will be ok should be a great source of help.

My Story with Delusions

Thinking the CIA are after me would frighten anyone and I had to hide away from anyone who might inform them of my whereabouts. That meant cutting myself off from all forms of social contact and anyone who might ring the police.

That made me a prisoner in my own home and to avoid anyone knowing where I was living. Hiding away meant drawing the curtains all day so no body would recognize me through the windows and only going out late at night for fresh air when the streets were empty.

That created problems for getting food and utilities which were only possible through the internet of with the help of my family.

I wasn't out in the sunlight as that wasn't safe with people everywhere so sleeping through the day made me nocturnal which was not a normal way to live.

Before I was diagnosed I was living off social security benefits but unable to look for work with the paranoia and I became worried that my benefits would be discontinued so that I might end up homeless.

I believed I was the object of a man hunt and that my crimes against humanity were being broadcast on the radio and television which further cut me off from the society. This in addition to being isolated from the local community who might recognize my whereabouts to the CIA.

On my own the feelings of paranoia and emotional isolation made me more frightened and sapped my strength to deal with the fear and prevented me looking after my physical health properly. Ordinary tasks like cooking and cleaning became impossible.

The social isolation became particularly problematic as I was left on my own with the voices and delusions and there was no possibility of relying on anyone else for help. The normal sources of help from friends and family were not available and I was left on my own with the fear.

All alone and hiding away indoors magnified the delusions in my mind and made me even less capable of looking after myself and got to the point where I was frozen in fear and put me into shock. It became necessary to develop some insight to have the strength to counteract this.

The lack of functionality with looking after myself became obvious to my family and I was sectioned and taken to hospital and that meant being in close proximity to other people who might like my neighbours out in the community might be spying on me and passing information back to the CIA.

To develop insight it became necessary to talk about what I was thinking and question what was causing the problems I was experiencing. That proved particularly difficult as admitting what I was responsible for might mean information was being passed back to the government.

Thinking all this I became very isolated and withdrawn: I could get these thoughts out of my head and the thinking went on for days at a time, together with a voice that wouldn't shut up. I was too disorientated to challenge them until I was in the right environment and the right stimuli...

Another problem with the therapy was that it was something very painful to talk about and it was frightening to admit to myself I could have done something like that. Yet with placing trust in the doctor the insight acted as a source of strength to engage in a helpful dialogue about this.

Another problem was the damage to my self-esteem through thinking I had killed all those people made me suicidal as did the emotional pain it caused. However suicidal thoughts are terrifying and this has the effect of reducing all the pain and feeling worthless back down to having safety needs again.

Furthermore taking responsibility for the illness was only possible when there were moment of insight and the cognitive behavioural therapy allowed this up to a point but would come and go depending on the level symptoms in between times of insight and periods where the symptoms wore off.

Once calmed down and having being talked round by the cognitive therapist allowed periods of safety and I returned to feeling stronger emotionally and this useful for dealing with the next bought of symptoms.

I felt I had some more courage to combat the fear and some emotional strength to so that I was more resilient to the emotional pain. This could be combined with the insight again to amply these feelings and make them stronger and could be built upon by reminding me I am a worthwhile person despite the damaged worthless feeling of have been responsible.

The result here was to build and build a virtuous circle and very gradually build up more and more resistance to the difficult phases of the delusional thinking. Where there has been insight the feelings of getting stronger could be amplified because you know they are going to pass and things will return to normal.

This is a source of strength and inspires some hope with courage needed to combat the paranoia but also helps alleviate the low mood during episodes including knowing that with insight you can soothe the emotional pain knowing it might not be real.

In a similar way insight while it may stop the damaging effect of the delusions it can be combined with some positive reinforcement from a therapist so the next time we start feeling bad about ourselves we may be more resilient as with emotional strength we will feel less suicidal.

At the higher levels if we esteem ourselves we stand more chance of being who we are so we can find parts of our identity to see with insight we are not such bad people despite the delusions of responsibility. Self-actualisation brings this to the fore so there is more chance of self-esteem.

Another facet of finding out identity is that this in bringing into view is another basis to challenge the idea that you cannot be responsible for atrocities. The problem here is not just to question this through insight but if you truly know yourself it will reinforce the process of questioning delusions.

Finally during the worst periods it is necessary to inspire hope that the symptoms will pass and things will return to normal as when first starting out with the therapy the whole thing can feel hopeless. This problem can be gradually reduced over time with a good therapist.

Outcomes

One of the major uses of the cognitive behavioural therapy was that I was able to question the experience and develop resilience and periods where the symptoms could be stopped and controlled although not a complete cure.

The more I learn to challenge the delusion the calmer I got and the stress was reduced. Then as schizophrenia is thought to be stress induced the symptoms began to calm down even further and I got stronger and stronger while the delusions got weaker and weaker.

Finally I think the whole process of developing life with insight might be combined with that of compassion focused therapy for optimum effect and will increase the possibility of therapeutic self-growth in the different parts of the mental health system even more.