The use of humor in psychotherapy

Uso do humor em psicoterapia

A.H. Chapman; Mirian Chapman-Santana
From the Samur Hospital, Vitória da Conquista, Bahia, Brazil

SUMMARY
Humor can be a useful treatment technique in the hands of some psychotherapists. It may help the patient to see painful life events and situations from less threatening perspectives, and can take the anxiety and guilt out of many difficult circumstances and incidents. Humor can be valuable in talking with parents about the problems of their adolescent children, in working with adolescents themselves, in discussing difficulties encountered in the workplace and in social environments, in decreasing obstructive awe of the therapist and apprehensiveness about treatment, in dealing with problems such as male sexual impotence, and in many other areas. Some therapists, however, handle humor awkwardly; in their hands it misfires or falls flat, and they should avoid it.

Key words: psychotherapy, humor.

RESUMO
O humor pode ser uma técnica terapêutica útil nas mãos de alguns psicoterapeutas. O humor pode ajudar um doente a ver episódios e situações dolorosas da sua vida sob perspectivas menos ameaçadoras e pode retirar sentimentos de ansiedade e culpa provenientes de muitos acontecimentos e situações. O humor pode ser valioso quando o terapeuta está conversando com mães e pais sobre os problemas dos seus filhos adolescentes, em diálogos com adolescentes, na análise das dificuldades no trabalho e em outros ambientes sociais, para desfazer temores em relação ao terapeuta, para reduzir a ansiedade relativa ao tratamento em si mesmo, no tratamento de impotência sexual em homens e em muitos outros problemas e tipos de doentes. Todavia, alguns terapeutas não usam bem o humor e nas mãos deles acaba dando errado ou deixa de produzir os efeitos desejados; estes terapeutas não devem utilizar-se do humor.

Palavras-chave: psicoterapia, humor.

REFERENCES
The use of humor in psychotherapy with patients with chronic and serious mental illness has been widely described. Advocates of its use have come from all major psychotherapy orientations, including existentialists [23, 24], dynamic therapists [25], behaviorists [26] cognitivists [19], paradox-oriented therapists [27, 28], family therapists [29], Gestalt therapists [30], provocative therapists [31] and others, and it has even been presented as an important aspect of supportive therapy for caregivers of people suffering from SMI [32]. The techniques used in the many approaches vary widely and until recently, the use of humor by the clinician has been viewed very negatively. It is “breaking the frame,” a “misalliance,” a clear sign of “counterresistance” and “definite acting out on the part of the therapist.” [The writers in this anthology discuss] the metapsychology of wit, humor, and jokes and how it affects the [psychotherapy] process, for better or worse. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2012 APA, all rights reserved). Do you want to read the rest of this article?