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Opinion

# Main Principles of Internal Cohesion Psychotherapy and the Qualities of Internal Cohesion Psychotherapists

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## Opinion

Mental health disorders are caused by multiple factors and manifested with a great range of symptoms, thus requires different forms of intervention. Psychotherapy is a common and popular approach to treat various mental health disorders and emotional difficulties, by helping clients through communication to create adaptive coping skills and to respond effectively to difficult circumstances [1,2]. Different mono-psychotherapy approaches have been created in the last century and became widely used by mental health practitioners to treat psychological disorders [3-6]. In recent years, psychotherapy gradually shifted toward eclectic or integrative approaches [7] aiming for a better understanding of psychopathologies and more effective treatments. Internal Cohesion Psychotherapy (ICP) is a new eclectic approach [8,9], which integrates best theoretical perspectives and practices with the overarching goal – to help clients reach the internal cohesion. The internal cohesion is defined as a condition in which the client is able to address disturbing and adverse experiences from the past, deal with the current circumstances effectively and plan adaptively the own future. The core components of ICP approach are systems (intrapersonal, interpersonal, professional and spiritual) and three-time perspectives (client's past, present and future). Systems are composed of client's important relations, which are interrelated with one another and dependent on the construct of time [10]. Therefore, during ICP intervention, the therapist guides the client to go through the important events in the past, the current experiences, thoughts, and feelings as well as future plans related to each system.

Recent evidence [9] confirmed the effectiveness of ICP in treating depression and anxiety with the clients who received treatment appraising practicability and simplicity as main ICP values. The ICP approach follows a 10-step process in order to reach client's internal cohesion. Each of the steps requires certain abilities, skills and competencies from psychotherapist. Most importantly, the ICP psychotherapists should have the ability to create a healthy therapeutic relationship, which provides to the client the opportunity to communicate openly and sincerely. Creating an environment in which prejudices are not allowed and a high cultural sensitivity is shown, encourages open communication and helps the ICP therapist to reach the overarching goal – internal cohesion. The adaptive therapeutic relationship affects the quality of client's reflection, which in turn enables the client to create a better intrapersonal, interpersonal, professional, and spiritual relationship. However, the quality of the therapeutic relationship is prone of multiple and continuous efforts of psychotherapist to address the clients concern. Treating effectively the mental health disorders, requires also active listening, which makes the client feel accepted, and empathy as an important signal that the client is being understood. The ICP therapists invest in reaching high standards of active listening and empathy, which in turn develop client's trust in psychotherapy. Therefore, only when the client's trust is earned, the therapist should demonstrate the skills of challenging the distorted, impulsive, automatic and negative thoughts and false memories of the client.

In search for the client's internal cohesion, the ICP therapist should go through a long process of asking the right questions that enables client's self-reflection, as well as reinforce client's positive attributes and values. Asking the right question could not be independent from the clinical reasoning and careful interpretation of client's perspectives, which are considered among core elements of ICP approach. Moreover, the psychotherapist is required to master the ICP techniques and strategies, which are designed to help the client deal with problems related to four ICP systems and three-time perspectives. As described in the ICP approach guidelines [8], when only questioning is not sufficient to reach the internal cohesion, psychotherapists should embrace professional abilities, skills, and competencies to provide psychoeducation as an alternative. Effective knowledge, skills and competencies needed to succeed in psychotherapy are fluid and changeable over time and extensively depends on client's uniqueness. As such, remaining in touch with the state of the art in psychotherapy, needs continuous professional development. Psychotherapy approaches that tend to stay static may not address client's needs. Thus, the final task of an ICP therapist is to test continuously the effectiveness of ICP approach and to enrich the Internal Cohesion Psychotherapy (ICP) with effective techniques, methods and intervention strategies that helps clients reach the internal cohesion.

## Author Contributions

The first two authors Arlinda Gashi and Vanesa Sopjani share equal contributions.

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