

Understanding & Handling of High Conflict Complainants

Dr. Chiu Siu Ning

(趙少寧醫生)

snchiupsy@gmail.com



Content

- General complaint management attitude and skills
- Concept of High Conflict Complainants, their characteristics and relationship with Personality Disorders
- Tips in handling High Conflict Complainants



Paradigm Shift

- In the society
- In us??



General Complaint Management Attitude & Skills



General Complaint Management Attitude

- Everybody has the right to complain
- Not every complaint people make needs to be reasonable
- Allowing unreasonable complaint is the hallmark of a civilized society
- Making unreasonable complaint in a formalized channel is far better than making nuisance in an indirect manner



General Complaint Management Skills

- Skills in complaint management:
 - Think:
 1. *“How many complaints have you made over the past year?”*
 2. *“How many discontents about services have you come across in the past year?”*
- Why is there a discrepancy??



General Complaint Management Skills

- Even if I cannot do anything about the complaint matter, I can certainly say/do something to soothe the complainant's emotion
- Documentation
- Complaint management protocol
- Security setting



Concept of High Conflict Complainants, Their characteristics and Relationship with Personality Disorders



What are High Conflict Complainants?

- High Conflict Complainants (HCC) are those who constantly get into conflicts and often behave badly
- They blame others and avoid taking responsibility for their own problems
- They focus on behaviour of others



What are High Conflict Complainants?

- They are preoccupied with confronting a **“Target of Blame” (TOB)**
- The pattern of blaming is unconscious i.e. they are totally unaware that it is a problem and that it’s their *own* problems
- By ***blame-speaking***, they feel safer and stronger
- Many of them fall into the Cluster B of **Personality Disorders (PD)**



Recognize HCC in Daily Life

1. Rigid and uncompromising
2. Unable to accept or heal from a small loss
3. Negative emotions dominate their thinking
4. Difficulty empathizing with others
5. Preoccupied with blaming others



DSM Classification of PD

- **Cluster B :**
 - Antisocial PD
 - Borderline PD
 - Histrionic PD
 - Narcissistic PD
- People with these disorders tend to be
 - Dramatic
 - Emotional
 - Erratic



Antisocial PD

Essential characteristics of Antisocial PD:

- Not conform to social norms
- Deceitful
- Impulsive
- Lack of remorse
- Lack of empathy
- Controlling
- Most of them are Conduct Disordered children before the age of 16
- *Tends to be overwhelming, very demanding and controlling when making complaint*
- *More likely than others to resort to violence*



Borderline PD

Essential characteristics of Borderline PD:

- Intense abandonment fears
- Inappropriate anger
- Unstable but intense relationships
- Repeated self-harm
- Impulsive
- Leads an erratic life, disorganized in daily activities
- Extremely self-centered
- *Tends to focus on interpersonal issues and her emotional feelings when making complaint*
- *Tends to be very emotional and may use threatening words when making complaint*



Histrionic PD

Essential characteristics of Histrionic PD:

- Always wants to be the centre of attention
- Emotional expression is shallow and changes rapidly
- Speech is excessively impressionistic and lacking in detail
- Extremely self-centered
- *Tends to be manipulative and overstating the suffering when making complaint*



Narcissistic PD

Essential characteristics of Narcissistic PD:

- False sense of self-importance, achievement and status
- Regards himself as special
- Needed to be treated as special
- Exploitative
- *Tends to be demanding unrealistically , boastful and to be treated specially when making complaint*



Skills in Handling HCC

- 1: Don't Take Personal Attacks Personally
- 2: Don't Give Them Negative Feedback
- 3: Set Clear Boundaries set with Borderlines
- 4: Don't be Rude to the Narcissists
- 5: Don't Get Hooked by Histrionics
- 6: Don't Get Controlled by Antisocials



1: Don't Take Personal Attacks Personally

- You may have already taken it personal when you:
 - a) Feel you have to **defend** yourself
 - b) Feel **constant fear or anger** when being attacked verbally
 - c) Start thinking **It's All Your Fault**



2: Don't Give Them Negative Feedback

- Negative feedback can induce further complaints, even violence
- Understand their basic psychology:

Types of HCC	Constant Fear
Borderline PD	Fear of abandonment
Narcissist PD	Fear of being inferior
Histrionic PD	Fear of being ignored
Antisocial PD	Fear of being dominated



3: Set Clear Boundaries with Borderlines

- a) Don't act too big
- b) Don't reinforce unrealistic expectations of intimacy
- c) Create clear expectations in relationship
- d) Pay attention to your gut feelings of discomfort
- e) Remind yourself that you have the right to be assertive when requests are unreasonable
- f) Take boundary violations seriously, including violence, threats of violence and verbal attacks



4: Don't be Rude to the Narcissists

- a) It's a natural intention to "put down" a narcissist, but don't do that, please!
- b) If possible, realize their real strengths and compliment them
- c) Let them know great effort has been paid to handle his case
- d) Keep a distance in relating with them when complaint-handling is over



5: Don't Get Hooked by Histrionics

- They are naturally charming by appearance and by what they say
- Don't buy their whole stories
- Asks for evidences
- You should expect to achieve 5 min. of constructive talk over 30 min. of conversation
- Better to handle the same complainant by the same person



6: Don't Get Controlled by Antisocials

- a) Be alert for unusual stories that require you to do something
- b) Pay attention to your gut feelings
- c) Don't believe in totality of what they say
- d) Maintain a healthy skepticism
- e) When you read lies, you do not need to unveil it immediately



Summary

- Complaint management is a challenging task, it involves correct attitude towards complaints and a positive view towards the value of managing complaints
- Some complainants are more difficult than usual. They may reflect an underlying personality problem. Handling them requires certain skills



Caution

- Don't ask a High Conflict Person to handle a High Conflict Complainant!!



Thank You!!

