Kleinman’s Eight Questions

Psychiatrist and anthropologist Arthur Kleinman’s theory of explanatory models (EMs) proposes that individuals and groups can have vastly different notions of health and disease. Kleinman proposed that instead of simply asking patients, “Where does it hurt,” the physicians should focus on eliciting the patient’s answers to “Why,” “When,” “How,” and “What Next.”

Kleinman suggests the following questions to learn how your patient sees his or her illness:

1. What do you think caused your problem?
2. Why do you think it started when it did?
3. What do you think your sickness does to you?
4. How severe is your sickness? Do you think it will last a long time, or will it be better soon in your opinion?
5. What are the chief problems your sickness has caused for you?
6. What do you fear most about your sickness?
7. What kind of treatment do you think you should receive?
8. What are the most important results you hope to get from treatment?