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EMPATHY IN TREATING FORENSIC PATIENT

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Introduction: Understanding through empathy is defined as an interpersonal process, the objective of which is to positively influence the course and outcome of psychotherapy. In such understanding, the harmony between our intellectual apprehension and our emotional perception of the patient is crucial.
Objectives: The research was concerned with the influence that the criminal act has on the therapist's initial view of and attitude toward the patient. This fact, so remote from the therapist's own experience, somewhat diminishes the therapist´s level of empathy at the beginning of the treatment.
Method: The study covered 46 psychiatrists who treated persons with mental illness who committed criminal acts. The level of empathy was measured at the beginning of the treatment and after three and six months. Emotional Empathic Tendency Scale (EETS, Bryant) and Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI, Davis) were used for the assessment.
Results: The results obtained show that the level of empathy measured was low on both scales at the beginning of the therapeutic process, but empathy increased after three and six months. These results were significantly influenced by the type of crime and the established diagnosis.
Conclusion: The initial position defined by „what the patient has done“ disrupts the therapeutic relationship. Hence it is important to make as sharp distinction as possible between an objective image of the patient and the therapist´s own projections. This enables the therapist to better understand the patient, gain his trust, skilfully manage the mutual relationship and achieve the therapeutic objectives.

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