



Patients' personality in disease self-management. A self-determination perspective

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between the personality and patient activation. It also tested the mediator effect of autonomy support from physicians in the relationship between the personality factors and patient activation. We relied on a sample of 335 participants ($M_{age} = 37.85$, $SD = 12.60$) who had a medical diagnosis. The study's results showed that extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness were positively related to patient activation, whilst neuroticism was negatively related to it. Autonomy support from physicians was shown to be a mediator in the relationship between the personality factors and patient activation. When receiving autonomy support from their health practitioners, patients tend to be more engaged, facilitating recovery, reducing complications, costs, and having overall better health outcomes. These findings might be considered for implementing more collaborative interventions in order to improve patients' activation and supporting them to maintain an active role in their health.

Keywords Patient activation · Personality · Big five · Self-determination theory · Autonomy-support

Introduction

Having and managing a disease could be stressful and difficult for people (Aubeeluck & Luximon-Ramma, 2020; Byles et al., 2014), and implies high levels of effort. Depending on certain individual differences, people perceive the disease and choose to manage it differently. Patients need to find resources to adhere to medical regimens, engage in regular exercise, maintain a healthy diet, seek disease-related information, stay confident in a significant improvement, or cooperate with the physicians (Hibbard et al., 2004). Researchers and practitioners became interested in interventions that increase activation levels in patients (Smith et al., 2016) or need-supportive interventions' efficiency in physical and psychological health (Ntoumanis et al., 2020) and start to appreciate an involved patient's value. Despite this, existing

literature has shown that some patients are intrinsically more active than others and have better recovery or treatment outcomes (Hibbard et al., 2015), important aspects in healthcare providers' work even to the point that patient involvement in managing the disease can minimize medical costs (Greene et al., 2015). Therefore, it is necessary to investigate how relatively stable individual differences can affect the perception of received medical support and distinguish between active and inactive patients for more precise predictions, and to reflect real-life situations as possible.

In this regard, it is widely known that personality is relatively stable across a fairly long period (Ashton, 2013) and is a strong predictor of health behavior (An et al., 2019; Strickhouser et al., 2017). According to self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017), motivation and autonomy sense are essential factors in achieving a goal, especially a long-term one. Numerous psychology areas, from sport and educational psychology (Behzadnia, 2020; Van den Berghe et al., 2013), parenting (Van Petegem et al., 2017) to health psychology (Behzadnia et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2006), examine how the perception of need-supportive behaviors leads to higher autonomy in people which is related to positive cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes. The present study tested the predictive role of personality traits in patient activation level and the mediator effect of perceived physicians' autonomy support.

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