Ethics of empowerment for psychiatric patient

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Yuli Veterans Hospital (YVH) is located in the remote Yuli, the mid-point of East Rift Valley in Taiwan. Since its establishment YVH has been taking care of the most disadvantaged mentally ill from all over Taiwan. The research team applied narrative identification method to approach 50 persons with schizophrenia who stayed in YVH. We managed to understand their life history and their subjective experiences of mental illness.

The persons who agreed to interview were clinically insightful to their illness. According to the literatures, the insight into mental illness is helpful to early treatment, the implementation of community and vocational rehabilitation, and hence the better recovery outcome.

Through the interviews we found the most of the persons with schizophrenia had experienced the presence of ―not-me‖ at the initial stage of their illness. Oftentimes the ―not-me‖ experiences are quite a bit like the hallucinations or uncontrollable mood swings in psychiatry.

As the illness were getting worse they gradually could not tell the difference between ―me‖ and ‖not-me‖. And their cognition and behavior became so derailed from the ordinary life tract because of the influences of uncontrollable hallucinations or mood swings. To most of them the feelings of getting ill can be only re-experienced in their remembrance. That is, only in their recovering they can remember and tell the difference between ―me‖ and ‗not-me‖ in their subjective experiences.

Oral history of narrative identification method presumes that everyone has his/ her own logic of life and the same for the mentally ill. As they can differentiate ―me‖ and ―not-me‖ in their perception experiences they become deeply aware and cognitive of their mental illness. As a result, they can actively seek medical help at the early stage of symptom relapse, and discuss with the healthcare staff about their treatment and rehabilitation plan.

In this article we applied the in-depth interviews and the diary of one patient to explore how the persons with severe mental illness strived for internal equilibrium and what their potentials and limitations were to regain their autonomy. Also, through the narratives and self-observations in the patient‘s diary we explored how the Yuli Veterans Hospital built a supportive environment by reinterpreting the three-level therapeutic community and mental health professionals‘ mediating efforts. In this supportive environment the autonomy of the patients can be exerted more actively in their recovery journey.