

1. Abstract

The aim of my research was to explore as an integrative psychotherapist self-care experiences of psychotherapists, from any modality, with a significant physical illness. The research was carried out with semi-structured interviews with six co-researchers (psychotherapists), including myself, using the qualitative research method of heuristic inquiry to identify themes from the interviews.

My focus was a heuristic quest; full and complete depictions of the experience from the frame of reference of the experiencing person. Douglas and Moustakas stated 'listen carefully for messages within meanings' (1985 p. 472).

The aim of this project was to discover different and effective ways of managing self-care so as to sustain the professional self. My findings suggested themes of pacing (keeping a sustainable level of activity), healthy diet, exercise, mindfulness, empathy, meditation, supervision, personal therapy and contact with family and friends to maintain self-care, which if not well managed had negative consequences on the client therapeutic relationship and the psychotherapist.

Psychotherapists' life is a tension between self-preservation and self-care and being nurtured. They typically have higher levels of distress being continually exposed to clients' trauma, though the resources of the therapists and clients were the catalyst to experience development in personal and professional training for self-care. The co-researchers used a broad range of self-care methods, which was sensitive to their fluctuating needs. During my training as an integrative psychotherapist I found there was little training included about self-care as did the other co-researchers.