Keynote – Serena Barello

Engagement in healthcare and participatory medicine: new scenarios and professional opportunities for organizational psychologists

ABSTRACT

The care demand is deeply mutated in quantity and quality, so that a radical change in the way the care demand is managed is now needed in contemporary medicine. Many factors are pushing healthcare systems forward to find new organizational and relational forms that might be much more effective and efficient in the dialectical interaction among professionals and patients/consumers. These factors include the emergence of new care needs related to chronic and degenerative diseases, the progressive ageing of population, the availability of new technology and easy-to-access health information, the differentiation of patients and caregivers' care needs, in a context of less-than-optimal human and financial resources. Taking care effectively of these factors and changes is warranted to promote a more sustainable and equitable healthcare system. Such changes represent a global social and economic challenge and they are also putting at risk the potentials of providing adequate solutions for the psychological well-being, the job satisfaction and the organizational commitment of healthcare professionals, which are now required to revise their traditional roles with respect to patients/consumers. According to recent studies, HCPs reported that a patient engagement-oriented approach to the patient care has implied deep changes for their professional identity (Barello et al., 2018). In such studies, HCPs referred that, unless the value of engaging patients is almost clear, this shift of paradigm is hard to be incorporated in routine practice because HCPs are mainly trained and socialized in an approach to care based on the treatment of the symptoms – often in acute settings. On the other hand, the role of professionals' practices and cultures, together with the level of professionals' work engagement, and organizational commitment has been demonstrated to be crucial variables in sustaining the patients' choice to engage actively in their own health management (Graffigna & Barello, 2018).

In order to take care of these global challenges, healthcare systems worldwide are starting to incorporate new organizational and relational models of professional-patient interaction, inspired by the paradigm of participatory medicine. To address this requirement, research has shown the importance of adopting a psycho-social vision of the patient engagement process (i.e. PHE model) for an innovative "patient-health professional relational agenda" able to sustain an engagement-sensitive approach to care (Barello et al, 2015).

Participatory medicine moves from the recognition that the engagement of all the stakeholders involved in the healthcare system is key to successful outcomes and organizational performance (Graffigna, Barello et al. 2017). On the one hand, the patients are active players and participate in the healthcare decision making process. On the other hand, this paradigm also requires the practitioners to reframe their professional roles and identity. In other words, while healthcare policies are driving the transition to an engagement-based system of public health clinicians are required to acquire new knowledges and skills which may enable them to effectively manage the new demand of care. This "imperative" has been confirmed by the recommendations developed by the Italian Consensus Conference for Patient Engagement (Graffigna, Barello et al., 2017) and innovative trainings are warranted to socialize health professionals to this approach (Barello et al., 2017).

The present contribution is aimed at discussing how this changing scenario may open new perspectives for the organizational psychologist – and for the psychological professional in

general. Specifically, the potential role of the psychologist as a mediator between the need of actively involved patients and the request of providing healthcare professionals adequate knowledge and skills will be highlighted. In other words, the organizational psychologist may be key in sustaining a dynamic and dialectical exchange among the involved stakeholders (professionals, patients/consumers, organizations) and in promoting a beneficial integration of different cultures and values into new relational models and organizational framework inspired by an “ultra-disciplinary” approach. Thus, the contemporary challenges posed by the healthcare system can be an unprecedented opportunity for the organizational psychology field to catalyze the transition to a new cultural paradigm in healthcare, characterized by the overcoming of an individualistic logic and the incorporation of social and systemic perspective that could be the basis for an effective dialogue between expert (i.e. professionals) and lay (patients/consumers) actors, the "inside" and the "outside" of healthcare organizations.