



A gifted person goes to the doctor...

Having a (very) high intelligence has many advantages. However, a number of highly intelligent people experience some disadvantages too, with negative implications for their health. This leaflet is intended to present what we think doctors and other care professionals should know about being gifted in combination with health.

This leaflet is based on knowledge about giftedness in general, a large quantity of practical experience and research (unpublished to date) about the experiences of gifted people with health care professionals.

Nowadays we see giftedness as a set of characteristics of which a high intelligence is just one. The table below shows how the characteristics of giftedness relate to possible health issues.

What is giftedness? (Kooijman, 2008)	Positive characteristics	Possible health issues
Intelligent; a high IQ (thinking)	Quick overview, quick expertise	Can be seen as a know-it-all; can resemble autism spectrum disorder; sleeping problems; for the elderly: can hide dementia.
Autonomous (being)	Independent	Conflicts; work- and relationship problems (too stubborn).
Multi-faceted (feeling)	Nuanced	Too emotional; difficulties with regulation of emotions; feeling excluded; suicidal thoughts (from a young age).
Sensitive (perceiving)	very perceptive	Oversensitive to stimuli; will isolate him/herself; feels physical changes very quickly and in great detail.
Passionate and curious (wanting)	Driven and curious	Unstoppable; can resemble ADHD*; if held back: bore-out (extreme boredom); stress symptoms (like stomach pains, headache, sleep disturbed).
Creation-directed (doing)	Productive	Does many unnecessary things; can resemble ADHD*.
Creative	Creative, innovative	Loose cannon; can resemble ADHD*.
Intense	Very involved	Crosses own boundaries; risk of becoming overstressed and burn-out.
Quick	Fast, quick to learn new things	Loses contact with others; depressive complaints; existential loneliness (more prominent in the elderly).
Complex	Good overview	Gets lost in details; can present as different psychiatric conditions.*

* both in children as adults (see IHBV-leaflets: 'Gifted and more'; 'Giftedness and ADHD').

Communication with the gifted patient

Gifted patients are most likely to search for a lot of medical information themselves and will ask more questions and also more probing questions when speaking with their doctor. Sometimes this can lead to conflicts. The gifted patient can ask difficult questions and the caregiver can feel like they are not taken seriously as a professional or sometimes feel intimidated.

Some gifted patients will explain their complaints very differently from average patients, so that a condition may not be recognised, the patient doesn't feel heard, a diagnosis takes longer than usual and conflicts can arise (see IHBV-leaflet 'Clever patient can be difficult for doctor').

What to do if you think your patient is gifted?

Giftedness is not a 'diagnosis'. However, many gifted people are happy when they know it and it can give them some peace of mind ("I'm not crazy"). Many gifted people only discover they are gifted into trouble in the workplace or in their personal lives. Because there is a greater focus on gifted children in recent years, parents often start to wonder if it concerns them as well. The earlier in life someone knows what giftedness is and how to live with it in an effective manner, the better.

Some gifted people have complaints or problems that will need psychiatric treatment. Unfortunately there is currently hardly any knowledge about giftedness in the psychiatric field of expertise (see IHBV-leaflet: 'Adult gifted clients in mental health care'). On the website of the IHBV you can find a list of caregivers with knowledge about giftedness.

As a doctor you can point people to a number of informative websites. On the website of the IHBV there is a wealth of knowledge on giftedness in adults and elderly people (see IHBV-leaflet: 'Not everyone is average' and the page about gifted seniors).

Contact with other gifted people is proven to be very valuable. There are HB-Cafés organised by the IHBV or gatherings of Mensa, the high IQ society. Contacts people make through the internet on forums or Facebook can be very supportive as well.

Reference

Kooijman - van Thiel, M.B.G.M. (red). (2008). Hoogbegaafd. Dat zie je zó! Over zelfbeeld en imago van hoogbegaafden. Ede: OYA Productions.

Translation: Yvonne Veltmaat