Doll therapy for Elderly Patients at Acute Care Setting

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**Introduction**

In Hong Kong, Doll therapy was initially introduced to a convalescent hospital settings for the soothing and comforting of demented patients. There has been no report on its effect in the acute care setting. The hospitalization experience of demented elderly in an acute care setting can be quite disorienting, triggering more confusional states and problematic behaviors. Thus, in October 2014, dolls were introduced to a geriatrics ward in an acute care setting: the "Hug Hug Programme" has been started and coordinated with multidisciplinary efforts, involving Occupational therapists, doctors and nurses.

**Objectives**

1. To explore the nurses perception on the use of doll therapy 2. To explore the selection criteria for using Dolls 3. To evaluate the effectiveness on Doll users

**Methodology**

Before the start of the programme, the dolls was firstly assessed for suitability by an Occupational therapist and was approved by the entire team. To promote the proper understanding of the programme and avoid misunderstandings among visitors and relatives; a poster about the programme was posted up at the nursing station. A lecture by the occupation therapist was conducted for ward nurses on the principles and concepts of doll therapy. Patients presented with agitation, delirium or confusion in the ward was selected by doctors or nurses. Nurses then introduced the doll to the patient and their caregivers. An education pamphlet on use of doll therapy was provided to caregivers of patients who responded positively upon discharge. To evaluate the effectiveness and acceptance of the programme, both nurses and patient factors were examined. A questionnaire for nurses' perception has been
conducted in Jan 2015 for all ward nurses. A retrospective review from case notes was conducted on all doll users from Oct to Dec 2014.

**Result**

17 of 19 ward nurses (84%) replied the questionnaire. Among them, 73% (14) had taken care of patients on doll therapy, 37% (7) of them had initiated the use of the doll. Results showed positive feedback towards the programme. Nurses' perception on the effectiveness of doll therapy scored overall 6.5 our of 10 (range 3.2-9.0). Further to this, all of them suggested continuing the "Hug Hug Programme". The scores (0-10, 10 for strongly agreed) for 5 questionnaire items were: 1) reducing disturbing behaviour (6.8); 2) promote moments of peace and tranquility (6.6); 3) encourage patient's emotional expressions (6.4); 4) minimize restraints (6.4); and 5) enhance communication between patient and caregiver (6.3). Additional comments for successful implementation included: screening patient's background, poor acceptance in aggressive patients; and female gender preference. Ten doll users were reviewed. All were female. The mean age was 86.4 yrs. Four (40%) patient continued with the doll's therapy till discharged and were discharged with a doll. The successful group was younger; (82.5yrs Vs 89.7Yrs), and were more likely to be demented (100% Vs 66%) having that diagnosis. Failure group patients tended to be more physically ill, whereas successful patients were mostly admitted with confusion or caring issues. Conclusion: Nurses generally credited doll therapy with increasing quality of care for elderly patients. Ours results showed that doll therapy might be more suitable for elderly female dementia patients admitted with minor symptoms or social-psychological complaints. The selection of patient was the key to success of the programme. Last but not the least, we have shown that doll therapy is well accepted by nurses, patients and relatives in the acute care setting.