



Service Priorities and Programmes
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Submitting author: Mr MAN LUNG WONG

Post title: Occupational Therapist II, Kwai Chung Hospital, KWC

Use of therapeutic art to improve mood and wellbeing of depressed elderly: a pilot OT study

Wong ML(1), Lee GYY(1), Lee SW(2), Chan SL(2), Mak SF(2)

(1) Occupational Therapy Department, Kwai Chung Hospital, (2) Art in Hospital

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Introduction

Artistic activity is widely used as a therapeutic activity in clinical settings for people with a variety of medical or psychiatric conditions. This pilot study aimed to explore the therapeutic effect of artistic activity on mood and psychological wellbeing of psychogeriatric day-patients with depressive symptoms. A one-year art project was jointly organized by Occupational Therapy Department of Kwai Chung hospital and Art in Hospital, a charitable institution aims to serve the community through therapeutic art creation.

Objectives

(1) To improve mood and wellbeing of day-patients with depressive symptoms in Psychogeriatric Ambulatory Care Center (2) To promote the therapeutic use of art in psychogeriatric patients

Methodology

The study was conducted in 4 phases. Each phase consisted of six 90-minute art creation sessions implemented by 1 OT and 2 artists. Psychogeriatric day-patients with depressive features that have interests in artistic activities were included in the study. A 'Pre- and Post-test' design was employed in Phase 2, 3 and 4. Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS) and WHO-Five Well-being Index (WHO-5) were adopted as outcome measures of mood and psychological wellbeing respectively. GDS and WHO-5 were administered before and after each phase. Qualitative feedbacks from participants were collected. A satisfaction survey was administered after each phase. The training content included acrylic painting (Phase 1 and 2), traditional flower board making (Phase 3), use of digital camera and fabrication of visual diary (Phase 4).

Result

In Phase 2 and Phase 3, there was a significant improvement in participants' well-being as shown in the increase in WHO-5 scores by 2.7 points (N=7, p=0.046) and 3.2 points (N=13, p=0.059) respectively. The GDS scores were decreased by

1.86 points and 1.85 points respectively, but the changes not yet reach statistical significance. From qualitative feedbacks in Phase 1 to Phase 4, most participants revealed the art creation processes had positive effects on their self-confidence, sense of achievement, self-appreciation and social support among them. From the pilot study, it was suggested that the therapeutic effects of artistic activity were mediated through participants' cooperation, mutual appreciation and active self-expression of feelings during the art creation processes. In summary, there was a positive therapeutic effect of artistic activity on mood and psychological wellbeing of depressed elderly. However, a future larger scale RCT study is recommended.