



Service Priorities and Programmes Electronic Presentations

Convention ID: 768

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Enhancing Wellbeing of Psychogeriatric Patients Through Art Creation: A Randomized Controlled Crossover Trial

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Keywords:

art

wellbeing

mood

psychogeriatric

Introduction

Art activity is widely used as a therapeutic medium in psychiatric and psychogeriatric patients. Researches support that art therapy improves mental wellness of frail elderly and patients with depression (Johnson & Sullivan-marx, 2006; Morais et al., 2014). Self-exploration, self-expression, communication, understanding and explanation, integration, symbolic thinking, creativity and sensory stimulation are identified as therapeutic factors in art therapy (Blomdahl et al., 2013). A structured 8-week creative art program (90 minutes weekly) incorporating these therapeutic factors and adopting recovery-oriented approach was conducted for psychogeriatric patients in OT department of Kwai Chung Hospital. A variety of art media, such as acrylic painting, craft-making and clay art, were included in the programs. Patients participated in creative art program with facilitations from OT and artist instructors.

Objectives

To evaluate the effectiveness of the 8-week creative art program on improving mood and psychological wellbeing of psychogeriatric patients

Methodology

A prospective randomized controlled crossover trail design was adopted. Participants were recruited by convenient sampling from OT department of Kwai Chung Hospital. They were randomly allocated, by permuted blocked randomization procedures, to Group A – receive 8-week creative art program and then 8-week conventional program, or Group B – receive 8-week conventional program and then 8-week creative art program. Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS), World Health Organization Five Well-being Index (WHO-5) and Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS) were used to measure participants' mood and psychological wellbeing at week 0, week 8 and week 16.

Result

52 subjects were recruited and 47 successfully completed the program and assessments. There was no significant difference on age, gender and distribution of education level between intervention group and control group. However, significant differences on the baseline comparison of the outcome measures with better performance in control group were noted. After adjusting the baseline differences, significant differences between intervention group and control group in GDS ($p=0.03$) and SWEMWBS ($p=0.01$) were noted. The effect size of the 8-week creative art program comparing with control on the 3 outcome measures (GDS=0.121, SWEMWBS=0.162 & WHO-5=0.081) was small but significant. A focus group was conducted to evaluate the program: participants gave qualitative feedback that they got improvement in mood and self-esteem, with better concentration and felt more relaxed after attending art group. Results showed positive training effect on enhancing mood and psychological wellbeing of psychogeriatric patients after 8-week creative art program.