

Occupational therapy for a young female patient with obsessive slowness

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Although obsessive slowness has been considered an obsessive-compulsive disorder, there has been little progress in developing effective treatments. In this case report, we describe a young female patient with severe obsessive slowness, whose symptoms improved in an occupational therapy setting.

Obsessive slowness started at age 13. She took a long time to perform daily activities such as eating, bathing, toileting and washing, and gradually failed to accomplish these activities even with parental facilitation or help. She consulted a psychiatrist at age 15 and was treated with antidepressants under a diagnosis of obsessive slowness. However, the symptoms continued and she was admitted to our hospital at age 16.

The slowness of speech was so severe that we could not use a conventional cognitive behavioral approach via verbal communication. Therefore, we used a behavioral approach in an occupational therapy setting via non-verbal communication. First, in order to assess and review her activities of daily living (ADL), the patient, together with an occupational therapist, made a simple daily schedule which was easy to capture visually. Second, we focused on toileting failure, which embarrassed her and her family members. Behavioral approaches, such as prompting, modeling and a token economy were done, which resulted in a lower frequency of toilet failure and shorter time for toileting. Third, we focused on eating and bathing and added two activities to the token economy check list. After the slowness of these activities improved, we focused on complex activities such as interpersonal communication. Before her discharge from the hospital, the treatment methods were gradually shifted from a behavioral to a cognitive behavioral approach, in which we worked on the patient's relationships with her occupational therapist, the other medical staff and family members.

The patient's recovery suggests that an intervention via a behavioral approach in occupational therapy settings is effective in improving severe obsessive slowness.