

Characteristic communication techniques for patients with mental disorders at self-help group meetings

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Introduction: The formation and support of self-help groups for patients with mental disorders is essential for promoting community mental health welfare activities.

Objective: The objective of the present study is to clarify characteristic communication techniques among members within the process of forming a self-help group for patients with mental disorders.

Methods: In order to form a self-help group for patients with mental disorders who were being treated on an outpatient basis at the psychiatry clinic of a general hospital, a total of 130 weekly meetings, 90 minutes in duration, were held from 2005 to 2007.

Results: Forty-four patients participated in the meetings, and the breakdown of mental disorders was as follows: schizophrenia, 48%; mood disorders, 13%; pervasive development disorders, 7%; and others, 32%. The average number of participants per meeting was five. Major topics of meetings were: troubles in activities of daily living and measures, 44%; disorders and drugs, 17%; work, 14%; family relations, 7%; and others, 18%. As more meetings were held, characteristic communication techniques, such as reframing and humor, appeared naturally and frequently.

Discussion: Reframing refers to a change in the framing of perception of matters. For example, looking at a certain situation from another angle can modify a negative perception into a positive perception. Changing meanings alters the person's reactions and behaviors. It was very interesting that such phenomena were naturally observed during meetings. The results suggest the importance of creating an environment for patients with mental disorders to talk about their experiences and to listen to the experiences of others.