

Trafficked People Living With HIV/AIDS: What can OTs do?

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Introduction/ Description

The face of HIV/AIDS has changed dramatically over the years since the introduction of anti-retrovirals. People living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) are living longer and maintaining their occupational roles. The role of OT in HIV has changed from palliative care approach to rehabilitation approach. One major challenge that OTs working in Sydney metropolitan area face is locating suitable accommodation for PLWHA with cognitive impairments. These people are young (<65 y.o.). They are currently accommodated in the affiliated hospice for long periods (>12 months), waiting for appropriate accommodation. OTs recognise that changes in one's environment can affect the person's occupation and well-being. Long stays in the hospice affects the person's psychological well-being and the person becomes increasingly institutionalised.

A change in one's environment is also a situation faced by immigrants and its effect is even more apparent when one is trafficked. Trafficking is a complex problem and is defined in different ways. The impact that trafficking has is devastating. Individuals are exposed to sustained and repeated abuse including threats of death. The individual's control of their identity is lost. Seeking help from authorities is often not an option as the victim's movements are limited through coercion and fear of reprisals. These victims are also often from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB). The traffickers often restrict access to healthcare. This could have detrimental impact especially if the victim was trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation and when the health problem is HIV/AIDS. The victim may be unaware they have contracted HIV and they may only find out when it is diagnosed at the time of an AIDS Defining Illness.

Objectives

This paper will discuss the journey of a client from a NESB who was trafficked into Australia and the challenges faced by OTs working with her from the acute hospital and hospice where she has been staying for the past 15 months. Utilising a single case review, this paper will highlight the roles occupational therapists may play i) providing culturally appropriate assessments and treatments, ii) supporting trafficked PLWHA in Australia in self-empowerment and iii) advocating and promoting occupational justice for PLWHA.