

Sensory Modulation....Facilitating Occupation in Mental Health

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Introduction

Consumer feedback, adverse events, coronial inquiries and overseas experiences have led to seclusion and restraint practices have been identified as one of four national safety priorities in mental health in Australia.

This presentation will present the findings and experiences of introducing sensory approaches as a means of reducing the use of restrictive interventions and enhancing client engagement in illness self-management, in two facilities - a statewide child inpatient unit and a large inner city adult inpatient unit.

Sensory modulation approaches involve the provision of sensory-based treatment tools or the creation of appropriate environments that engage client's senses in different ways to reduce the build up of agitation and prevent the escalation of aggression (Haimowitz et al., 2006).

Objectives

To provide an overview of the process of implementing practice change with the introduction of sensory approaches as a means of self-regulation in child and adult inpatient units.

To highlight the approaches utilised into these two differing environments of developing skills in arousal modulation & relapse prevention with these client group

To illustrate the role and opportunity for occupational therapists in this area to develop their role in enhancing client skills in illness self-management.

Description/Report

A multifaceted approach to change management has been utilized including international benchmarking with other services, staff education, engaging consumers and multi-disciplinary staff; consumer feedback, demonstrating positive outcomes and the utilization of case studies.

Results/Discussion

The use of sensory approaches as a less restrictive strategy for arousal regulation has become an accepted strategy within these units and is being utilised by the multidisciplinary team. Consumer feedback describes an improved physical environment with improvements in illness self-management as illustrated by clients with a community safety plan experiencing less re-admissions.

Conclusion & Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy.

Occupational therapists can have an important role in advocating for less restrictive interventions and the use of sensory approaches to assist clients in developing skills and knowledge in illness self management and arousal regulation.