

Using sensory interventions to reduce seclusion rates in an Australian psychiatric inpatient unit.

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Introduction

The Alfred Hospital in Melbourne Australia is a large inner city hospital with a 54 bed psychiatric inpatient unit. In light of the relatively high rates of seclusion use in this unit & The Mental Health Act [Victoria, 1986] which has an emphasis on consumer rights and a requirement for treatment to be provided in the least restrictive environment, Seclusion Reduction Plan was developed which incorporated the use of sensory interventions.

Objectives To evaluate a range of interventions, including sensory modulation, aimed to reduce the rates of seclusion and other restrictive interventions in an acute psychiatric facility. To enable consumers to develop knowledge and skills regarding illness self-management.

To develop the role of occupational therapists in this environment.

Methods

A cross-sectional design was utilized to compare key outcomes for clients who have been an inpatient of the Acute Psychiatry Service and were either cared for prior to commencement of the project (Group 1), or had a Safety Tool completed when admitted (Group 2) or a more detailed Community Safety Plan, utilising the Sensory Profile [Dunn, 1999], completed during an outpatient assessment (Group 3).

The project involved the implementation of interview tools to elicit information regarding triggers, early warning signs of increased arousal and the client's preferred regulatory strategies. This information would be incorporated into an individualized acute and/or community safety plan.

Results

There has been a reduction in the use of seclusion during the period of the research project and a reduction in the re-admission rate for clients who were interviewed using the Sensory Profile with the subsequent development of a community safety plan.

Conclusion

Sensory interventions have been found to be a contributing factor in the reduced use of restrictive interventions and re-admission rate for the client group who received a community safety plan.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy.

This paper outlines an important contribution occupational therapists can make to the use of less restrictive interventions and to assist clients in learning more about their sensory preferences with a positive influence on their illness self-management.