

2029

The Impact of Social Skills Training in the Occupational Performance of Psychiatric Patients

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BACKGROUND AND AIMS: Patients with mental disorders are known to have difficulties in achieving emotional and instrumental objectives. Several researchers have established a link between psychopathology and a deficit in social skills. Social Skills Training (SST) has the potential to help people achieve those goals and therefore has been greatly solicited for the treatment of psychiatric patients. In our daily practice with patients with mental disorders, the use of SST has played an important role. We report the findings of an enmeshed SST program we applied to a group of psychiatric patients.

METHODS:

The intervention group consisted of 10 adult patients with mental disorders (schizophrenia, mood disorders, personality disorders) using the services of a Day Hospital Unit of a Psychiatric Service in a General Hospital. The social skills status was assessed during the observation of the occupational performance in real situations, in therapeutic context, in individual interviews and using paper and pencil methods and role-play techniques, the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (COPM) and the Social Avoidance and Distress Scale (SAD). Several problem areas were identified, including specific domains in language, communication, and socialization. According to individual and group needs and taking in account the patients' preferences, we defined a group objectives related to identified problem areas. The patients were submitted to a set of activities enmeshed in the usual plan of care, specifically designed to promote Social Skills Training. During training techniques like warm-up exercises, instructions, modelling and role-play, we adapted our approach according to the learning styles the person, resulting in a more effective process (Kolb Theory).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Our findings suggest an increase the occupational performance and a decrease in the social withdraw domains. Assertive behaviours in role-playing scenarios were strengthened. There was significant individual variability in social skills outcomes, probably linked to differential psychiatric diagnostics.

FINAL REMARKS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR OT PRACTICE:

The implementation of a SST program, enmeshed in the different Psychiatric Day Hospital activities, managed to improve Social Skills in a heterogeneous population. The change in patients' behaviours encourages us to use this type of approach with other clients and settings