The Effects of Humor Therapy on Older Adults

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Purpose of Study

Smiling, laughing, and humor is something that individuals come across everyday. People watch humorous videos, listen to comedians, and read the comics in the newspaper. However, is humor only beneficial in causing us to laugh, or can it be used for more? Can humor be used in a more structured form and reap more complex benefits than producing a smile or laugh? Researchers and therapists have been studying humor therapy, a form of therapy that “uses the power of smiles and laughter to aid healing” (Humor Therapy- Topic Overview, 2013). Can humor therapy produce positive effects when used with the geriatric population?

Review of Literature

- Reduces anxiety, tension, stress, depression, and loneliness, and increase self-esteem, hope, energy, empowerment, and control (Berk, 2001).
- Decreases depression symptoms, bad mood, seriousness and suicidal tendencies, and an increase in cheerfulness, life satisfaction, physical health. (Konradt, Hirsch, Jonitz, and Junglas, 2013).
- Supports client's social, emotional, and physical state in difficult times, such as life crisis or grief (Marziali, Hirsch, Jonitz, and Junglas, 2008).
- Decreases levels of chronic pain and loneliness, along with increases levels of happiness and life satisfaction. (Tse, Lo, Cheng, Chan, and Chung, 2010).
- Decreases levels of agitation by 20% in older adults with dementia (Laughter, 2011).

Knowledge Translation Plan

Older Adults with Alzheimer’s:
- Suggested therapy frequency: 9 sessions, lasting 2 hours, over a period of 12 weeks (Goodenough, 2012)
- Refrain from humor that requires a lot of memory (long jokes or funny stories)
- Use instant humor (clowns or funny pictures)

Older Adults with Chronic Pain:
- Treatment must produce laughter in order to release endorphins needed to relieve pain
- Avoid humor that could trigger client to remember the pain (videos showing people in pain)
- Only use this approach if client finds making light of pain helps to distract them from theirs.

Older Adults with Depression:
- Humor needs to facilitate positive emotions
- Use humor to distract from negative emotions
- Avoid humor that could trigger client to think about their reasons of being depressed
- Only use this approach if client finds that laughing at their negative emotions helps them to have a more positive outlook on them.

References