The Importance of Therapeutic Recreation Services for Oncology Patients

Longwood University

Beth Wildermuth
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Introduction

Cancer is one of the leading causes of death in the World. In 2012, 13.7 million people were dealing with this illness in the United States (2014). Therapeutic Recreation (TR) can be a wonderful benefit to the quality life of a patient with cancer. Therapeutic Recreation programs in hospitals, rehabilitation facilities and Recreation Centers are becoming more popular for their ability to help in the healing process. The importance of Therapeutic Recreation services for oncology patients is proven by the success of programs to improve health-related quality of life.

Literature Review

From research done by Malone et al. (1994), it was found that leisure and recreation is the second category to be greatly affected by the person having cancer. Malone et al also says that work is the first and home management is the third to be the greatly affect by a person having the diagnosis of cancer. Having leisure and recreation as the second category in a quality of life survey to be limited from the prognosis of cancer does show the importance of having Therapeutic Recreation services.

According to Garhardt (2011), Therapeutic Recreation can be defined as a service with the goal of enhancing quality of life through leisure and recreation while maintain or improving all areas of health. Services of TR can build endurance, enhances feelings of comfort and connectedness, and may improve physical function and for someone with cancer; all of these areas that need help. TR can also improve their physical, cognitive, social, and communication skills. From Voelkl’s (2008) experience in the hospital, she wrote, that casual leisure was one of the most important component to her recovery by providing stress relieving moments in the middle of a chaotic and busy time, being a buffer to the stress of hospitalization, allowing her to
look forward to the future, and making a hospital reflect the identity of the patient. She found that having leisure made it easier to cope with her illness.

One aspect of cancer that many do not think about is being isolated in a room because of the treatment. O Connell (1998), wrote about a Laminar Air Flow Room (LAFR) and how TR can help make the stay in a room like this bearable because of activities and interaction in and between the vinyl wall can decrease anxiety, boredom, passivity, and time-space disorientation that are closely related to being isolated. Another major issue that is related to cancer and other illnesses is stress and TR services can make a difference by providing music, art, humor, and pet therapy to patients and their families (Millington, 1997).

Probably one of the most stressful parts of a diagnosis of cancer is if the patient is terminal. Another way TR services can help is in palliative or end of life care by providing an increase in their sense of control, social interactions, and social support (Sourby, 1998). TR services also have the ability to give the patient some independence in their life where they might not have much in other areas.

Another environment that is being used by TR services to provide programs to oncology patients are camps. Camps provide a unique social experience where individuals with similar health conditions can get together and talk about their own experiences with cancer (Dawson, 2012). The goals for camps are to improve the camper’s quality of life by developing emotional stability, increasing interpersonal/social skills, developing feelings of competence, increase feelings of belonging, decreasing stress, improving physical fitness, self efficacy, perceived control, pleasure, enjoyment, and developing positive self esteem (Martiniuk, 2003). The camp at Barretstown Castle in Ireland for children with all types of cancer and other life threatening diseases provides its participants with a variety of activities to promote normalcy and instill the
idea that the child should challenge preconceived ideas about their limitations (Goldstone, 2000). 

Camps help the campers to cope with their illness and improve their self esteem by having a supportive community, normalizing experiences, and positive memories (Dawson, 2012).

One intervention that is related to camps is Adventure Therapy. This is a therapy that is used for adolescence with cancer to improve their quality of life. According to Steven et. al. (2004), Adventure Therapy can influence a person with cancer by providing experiences, tools, and skills to aid them in dealing with the meaning of living and possibly dying with cancer. In some cases, it allows the adolescent to move past the illness and live their life as normal as possible.

Discussion

From the research, it was found that Therapeutic Recreation services can improve an individual quality of life through every aspect of the treatment of cancer from diagnoses to remission or death. TR services can give the patient leisure to help them cope with their disease. It also gives the families a way to do activities with the cancer patients that are not focused on the illness. Therapeutic Recreation Services are important to the treatment of cancer patients because it is the service that is about them as a person and not the illness they are in the hospital for. TR serves the person first which allow them to hold on to their identity during the hard treatment of cancer.

Conclusion

Therapeutic Recreation has many benefits to individuals with cancer. If it is coping to the hospital stay or adapting to the world outside after being classified as in remission, TR services can have an important part in improving self awareness, normalization, independence, physical functioning, stress, and socialization. It allows the person to be an individual with cancer and not
a cancer patient. Cancer cannot define a person especially if the likes and interests of that person are being explored with the help of Therapeutic Recreation Services.
References


