Using Psychoeducation and Group Therapy to Enhance Quality of Life Among a Severe and Persistent Mentally Ill Population

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Psychoeducation and group therapy are key therapeutic components to a majority of inpatient treatment facilities because they have been shown to improve patients’ outcomes. However, effective means to implement them, especially psychoeducation, are deficient with indigent and severe and persistent mentally ill populations. The proposed study aims to determine whether psychoeducation, delivered in the form of a handbook, effects patients’ quality of life during treatment. The handbook will contain information that is integral to understanding and coping with a severe and persistent mental illness, and both participants and unit staff will promote the use of the handbook by incorporating it into the participants’ daily routine on the unit, including practicing several social and independent living skills covered in the handbook during group therapy. Approximately 50 to 100 participants who are deemed voluntary will be recruited from the Crisis Stabilization Unit of Henderson Mental Health Center, a licensed Baker Act psychiatric facility serving indigent and severe and persistent mentally ill populations in Broward County. The impact of the handbook on patients’ quality of life will be evaluated by comparing participants who report using the book at various frequencies outside of group therapy on a series of pre and posttreatment measures. Statistical tests (e.g., t-tests, repeated measures analysis of variance with between-subjects factors) will be performed in order to determine if there are any significant differences between groups of participants who use the handbook at various frequencies.

A Bold Initiative: Helping Senior Citizens Reach Beyond Themselves

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Senior citizens often become isolated and feel a loss of self-esteem as their self-sufficiency, circle of friends, and familiarity with new technology all become diminished. As stated online by the Lance Armstrong Foundation, “Social isolation can be a serious problem for senior citizens, and 28 percent of Americans over the age of 65 live alone, according to the Cornell Institute for Translational Research on Aging. When seniors live alone, the loss of their typical roles and events like the death of a spouse can cause loneliness and isolation.” (Livestrong, 2011)

The intent of this project is to improve the level of self-esteem expressed by a group of senior citizens as a result of their exposure to the use of technology. A comparison of the baseline levels of self-esteem at the start of the project with the levels indicated at the end will be the major independent variable. Anecdotal comments and recorded interviews will supplement the quantitative data.

Six to eight groups of 4 to 5 senior citizens each (i.e., those 50 or older) will be formed and then taught in one of three different locations. Of these 30 to 40 participants, probably half of them will own some type of computer but are not able to use it effectively. However, it is
important to their progress for each participant to practice during the week between classes. Therefore, part of this project will be to provide a refurbished computer and monitor for up to one-half of the participants. They will be able to keep the computer and monitor at the end of the project. The other half of the participants will use their own computers to practice the new skills they acquire in class.

All of the groups of seniors will become more confident in their use of computers and they will exhibit higher self-esteem by the end of the project. Students will meet with an instructor and coach(s) for two hours, once-a-week for approximately 32 sessions (i.e., four courses lasting seven weeks each plus a break of a week or more between each course). The project will conclude with a closing luncheon and award ceremony.

From the literature, we know that a majority of our older citizens have many needs. One need that we can address is the fact that many feel a lack of necessity to learn about new technologies (Pew Internet and American Life 2004, 2007). They also tend to be rather isolated from the rest of the world. We believe that by enhancing their skills in the use of new technologies and providing a basis of support, seniors will have an increased desire to continue using computers and we will see an improvement in their levels of self-esteem.

The project will involve an evaluation of the impact of the SeniorComp program on the level of self-esteem felt by a typical group of senior citizens. The program evaluation will consist of the administration of a set of questionnaires and surveys to the four groups of novice senior citizens during their participation in an eight-month technology course. The project will consist of a series of four consecutive computer literacy courses. Starting from the basics of computer use and the ability to handle a mouse, and moving on to email, the Internet, and word processing, the project will conclude with an introduction to videoconferencing. These topics will divided into a series of four courses. This represents the exposure that a typical SeniorComp student experiences.

The surveys and questionnaires will be administered at the start of the project and re-administered at the mid-point and again at the end of the project. In addition, a focus group will conducted near the mid-point so that the formative data collected can be used to help improve the remainder of the program.

Once we have sufficient data, we will seek major funding to expand the SeniorComp project. As a major objective of this project, we plan to formally demonstrate a major aspect of the SeniorComp program by measuring the impact that participation has on the lives of these seniors. Following six years of successful operation, over 100 low-income senior citizens in South Florida have already been introduced to the Information age and helped over the threshold of the digital divide. We believe that credible research will serve as leverage to enhance our potential success in obtaining significant funding to expand the project. Once funded to expand the project, we will be able to reach many more senior citizens.