

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

HEAD INJURY AND FAMILY CARERS: AN INNOVATIVE COMMUNITY BASED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR FAMILY CARERS AND PATIENTS-A PILOT STUDY

Researchers

Dr I Sinnakaruppan, Mr B Downey, Ms S Morrison

Aim

The Pilot study was intended to inform the design of an efficient full-scale trial with the objectives of; (i) formulating and evaluating an educational training programme to help carers and patients, (ii) improving patient/carers psychological distress and their ability to cope, and (iii) developing 'user friendly' material for carers and patients.

Project Outline/Methodology

Two groups of 20 matched subjects randomly assigned to experimental or control condition. Participants were recruited from the register at the Douglas Grant Rehabilitation Centre.

Each group comprised 20 carers and 20 head injured patients who were assessed using a range of psychological measures, pre-, post-programme and at follow up. The control group was assessed at the same time intervals. All patients were screened for cognitive problems at baseline and again at follow up. The educational training programme was offered to the experimental group over 8 sessions.

Key Results

- Of the 30 variables measured, the experimental group scores showed a positive change on 18 variables at post intervention. With the exception of 3 variables the changes were not statistically significant
- Of the 35 variables measured at post intervention, the experimental group scores showed a positive change on 32. When compared with the control groups changes in scores on these same variables, 15 measures exhibited a statistically significant improvement at 5 month follow up assessment.
- The RSE Scale (Self Esteem) was selected as the single primary measure; self esteem is considered reasonable in view of its cross correlation with other variables.

Conclusions

It would appear that at 5 month follow up the patient sample have shown statistically significant gains on many variables, including psychological health,

cognitive abilities and coping. Although the carer experimental sample have shown positive trends at post and follow up assessments these differences did not reach significance statistically. However, such changes might have reached significance had a longer follow up time been implemented. Longer follow up time may have allowed the gains by the patients to filter through to the improvement of their carers perception and psychological health.

What does this study add to the field?

This pilot study establishes the value of a structured educational programme for carers of head injured individuals and the patients. Structured information leaflets are valuable assets that help retention of information while providing a useful on-going point of reference for the future.

Implications for Practice or Policy

1. If carers received more attention their quality of life and that of their head injured would improve.
2. Specialist hospital staff dealing with brain injury should be fully aware of the long and short term consequences of this type of injury.
3. Structured information leaflets or booklets can help carers understand the head injury.
4. Patients and carers find continuation of support from hospital to community valuable.
5. Carers benefit from inclusion in the planning and execution of the rehabilitation programmes.

Where to next?

- (i) A larger multi-centre study involving a longer follow up time.
- (ii) Future studies should consider providing more sessions and a longer time interval between sessions.

Further details from:

Dr I Sinnakaruppan
Consultant Clinical Psychologist
Douglas Grant Rehabilitation Centre
Ayrshire Central Hospital
IRVINE, KA12 8SS

