

EFFICACY OF PARKINSON GROUPS FOR IMPROVING COMMUNICATION AND WELLBEING IN PARKINSON'S DISEASE

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Description

Communication impairment is one of the most common symptoms of Parkinson's disease, significantly impacting quality of life (Miller, 2012). Speech characteristics may include a soft, monotone, breathy or hoarse voice quality, imprecise articulation, dysprosody and dysfluency (Skodda et al., 2013). These characteristics, combined with reduced nonverbal communication, cognitive-linguistic impairment and poor self-perception of speech, make communication difficult and lead to self-consciousness, reduced likelihood to participate in conversation, and the avoidance of social interaction that requires speaking. Communication difficulties can compound issues of depression and related social isolation (Miller et al., 2006).

These substantial problems negatively impact social participation and vocational opportunities, and may lead to breakdown in family and social relationships.

Singing shares many of the neural networks and structural mechanisms used during speech and can thus be used therapeutically to target functional communication issues and provide rhythmic cues to stimulate and organize motor speech output. This pilot feasibility study investigated the effects of Parkinson singing groups over three months on speech and communication participation, using a comprehensive battery of measures.

Method

Participants with Parkinson's disease (n=77)

completed assessments of speech, voice and respiratory function at baseline and three months. Intervention participants (n=48) attended 2-hour weekly or monthly singing group sessions incorporating targeted vocal and respiratory exercises and singing specifically selected, familiar songs. These sessions were designed to elicit high intensity vocal output and respiratory effort, with the aim of improving communication outcomes. Control participants (n=29) took part in regular weekly or monthly peer support and/or creative activity groups that did not involve singing.

Discussion

Data analysis was underway at the time of submission, but results will be presented at the World Congress. Findings from the feasibility study and implications for further planned research will be discussed. Anticipated outcomes include: increased respiratory pressures, voice intensity, pitch and loudness ranges, improved voice quality, and communication confidence, and subsequent improved quality of life.

References

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