
2020 OTD Capstone Symposium

Spring 4-23-2020

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Recommended Citation

Gillio, Kendra C.; MacDermott, Susan; and Cohill, Becki, "Exploring the Occupation-Based Needs of Older Adults with Alzheimer's Disease at a Reminiscence Therapy Adult Day Center" (2020). *2020 OTD Capstone Symposium*. 14.

<https://soar.usa.edu/otdcapstonespring2020/14>

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Exploring the Occupation-Based Needs of Older Adults with Alzheimer's Disease at a Reminiscence Therapy Adult Day Center



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BACKGROUND



Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia, affecting approximately 60% to 70% of the older adult population aged 65 and older (Santos da Silva, de Oliveira Alves, Barros Leite Slagueiro & Bezerra Barbosa, 2018).



Reminiscence therapy prompts an individual's memory by stimulating their sense – sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch, and provides an opportunity for them to revisit and relive their past through their surrounding environment (Swann, 2013). For individuals with Alzheimer's disease, occupational therapy focuses on adapting the environment in order to promote their ability to engage in meaningful occupations, increase quality of life, and social participation; ultimately optimizing occupational performance (Letts, et. al, 2011).



PROBLEM

Activities of daily living, instrumental activities of daily living, leisure activities, and social activities are reported as problematic areas for individuals Alzheimer's disease and dementia (Padilla, 2011). Reminiscence therapy shows the potential to improve occupational functioning for an individual with Alzheimer's disease, however occupational therapy is not currently involved.

PURPOSE

Identify the occupation-based needs of older adults with Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

Outcome Objectives:

- Complete a needs assessment in order to identify the occupation-based activity related needs of individuals with Alzheimer's disease at an adult day care reminiscence therapy program.
- Develop and propose to the staff, program recommendations that will provide suggestions to adapt activities for the Alzheimer's disease population, based on data collection from the literature search and clinical observation.

METHODS

Qualitative data was gathered through participant, staff, and caregiver observation, surveys and semi-structured interviews at Glenner Town Square adult day care facility in Chula Vista, CA.

Participant Observation: Participant observation was completed over eight weeks at Glenner Town Square in Chula Vista. Four behaviors impacting activity engagement and social participation were identified.

- Sundowning, wandering, and exit seeking behaviors.
- Decreases in activity and social participation.
- Repetition
- Mood disturbances

Glenner Town Square Staff Survey: The staff survey included 12 open and close-ended questions focused on the needs, behaviors, and activity and social participation of the Alzheimer's disease and dementia population at Glenner Town Square. 3 Themes were identified.

- Current strategies for getting participants to engage in an activity.
- Strategies for increasing socialization between participants.
- Barriers to participation in activities.

Caregiver Semi-structured Group Interview:

The caregivers participated in a semi-structured group interview, which explored the needs of the population, their experiences, the daily challenges and barriers to caregiving for an individual with Alzheimer's disease or dementia and approaches or strategies to overcome those challenge

Acknowledgement: A special thank you to doctoral capstone project mentor Kathy Elgas, OTR/L

RESULTS

NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Participant Observation:

Behavior	Connection to Activity Engagement
Sundowning, Wandering, and Exit Seeking Behaviors	Restlessness, wandering, and exit seeking behaviors often caused an increase in participation disruption, agitated-like behaviors, and a lack of interest and attention in activity engagement.
Decreases in Activity and Social Participation.	Decreases in activity engagement and social participation could be linked to lack of interest, group sizes, level of cognitive ability to engage and maintain attention, or motivation.
Repetition	Participants may be repeating themselves because they are struggling to make sense of what is going on around them, feel anxious, are comfort seeking, and want reassurance (Regier, Hodgson, and Gitlin, 2016).
Mood Disturbances	Participants experienced mood disturbances, which can be a direct result of the disease, poor sleep, or other unseen agitations. These mood disturbances decreased activity engagement and was often distracting for other participants to maintain engagement.

Caregiver Semi-Structured Group Interview:

Theme	Example of Responses
Caregiver burden, concern, and burnout	"...Caregiving is a full-time job, twenty-four hours a day. It can be difficult to find alone time or get a rest break. Not to mention the financial strain."
Population needs	"Supervision is a must for my husband. I can't leave him alone for more than 5 minutes or he is searching for me, getting into something or having an 'anxiety or panic attack'. It really is challenging."

Glenner Town Square Recommendations:

Analysis of Observed Behavior	
• Provide more opportunities for the participants to engage in a variety of different exercises, such as playing games in the park or dancing.	
• Include visual, tactile, and verbal instructions (i.e. PowerPoint, pictures, handheld items, and verbal and written instruction, etc.) during all activities to increase participation amongst individuals who communicate and understand differently (i.e. theater reader activities, newsstand or T-bird "story time" activities).	
• During activities encourage staff to engage participants using cueing strategies that work best for the individual in order to spark spontaneous reminiscing and increase activity engagement. (i.e. one-step verbal cue, tactile cues in addition to the verbal cues, or multi-step commands).	
• Incorporate more activities which focus on the participant's senses (i.e. smell, sight, etc.) to increase activity engagement.	
• Reinforce schedule and activity routines at the start of each activity, or at the start of the day, in order to enhance the environment to support the cognitive level of the participant.	
• Provide activity opportunities for participants to work together in partners or small groups of two or three rather than larger groups of five or more, in order to increase social participation amongst peers or fellow participants.	
• Incorporate small activities, pictures or items that could spark conversation between participants who sit in silence after meals, to increase social participation.	
• Advise caregivers to take a picture of the participant in town square or of the participant with the staff at town square, and use it when their loved one is reluctant to come to town square and difficulties transitioning arises.	
• Provide a 'Take Home Report' of the activities participants participated in while at Town Square. The "Take Home Report" would facilitate an opportunity for communication between caregivers and their loved one.	
• Provide ongoing training to staff on working with individuals with Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Ongoing training and refreshers can help staff to stay relevant and up to date on providing the best care for this population	

Glenner Town Square Staff Survey:

Theme	Example of Responses
Current Strategies for Getting a Participant to Engage in an Activity	"I try to encourage them to engage if possible or ask them if they need help. Sometimes participants don't get involved because they don't know how or if they are able to do the activity" (Participant #3)
Strategies for Increasing Socialization Between Participants	"Be intentional about which participants sit near each other to try and promote conversations between people who are compatible" (Participant #5)
Barriers to Participation in Activities	"It is important to note that the participants don't all speak the same languages. So knowing who will be able to communicate with one another is important" (Participant #4).
	"...increases in anxiety leads to exit seeking behaviors, which causes a more disrespectful attitude and sometimes they become more aggressive" (Participant #5)

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