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Favorite music and hand massage: Two interventions to decrease agitation in residents with dementia

According to the Alzheimer Society of Ontario, it's estimated that 50% of all long term care home residents have some form of dementia. Many residents affected with dementia exhibit agitation and disruptive behaviours that include aggressive physical and verbal behaviours, as well as non-aggressive physical behaviours such as pacing, aimless wandering and restlessness. These behaviours may impact residents' care requirements as well as staff satisfaction and injury rates.

Relaxation techniques continue to be explored as a non-invasive intervention for those affected by dementia in long term care homes. In this study, Sandee Hicks-Moore and Bryn Robinson investigated the effectiveness of two non-invasive interventions in their study "Favourite music and hand massage: Two interventions to decrease agitation in residents with dementia". The study found that these interventions were found to be effective individually and when combined to decrease levels of agitation in long term care residents affected with dementia.

A standardized agitation inventory was used with residents affected with dementia living in special care units in three long term care homes. The study took place in two major cities in New Brunswick, Canada. Residents who displayed agitated behaviours were randomly assigned to either a treatment or control group. Those residents in the treatment group received a 10-minute intervention of either hand massage, favourite music, or hand massage while listening to their favourite music. Those residents in the control group were provided their usual care without these specific interventions.

Although this study found that there was no statistically significant difference in aggressive behaviours with the treatment, statistically significant reductions in agitation were seen in the physically non-aggressive and verbally agitated behaviours after the treatment interventions. It should be noted however that although statistical significance was not quite reached for the group of participants with aggressive behaviours, the data did demonstrate a trend towards reduction in such behaviours.

The literature indicates, on average, staff spend 23.1 minutes to intervene and manage agitated behaviours. However, spending 10 minutes utilizing effective therapeutic strategies, such as hand massage and favourite music, can result in an hour or more of reduced agitation for some residents and improve their quality of life. The strategy requires minimal training, supplies and time and can be administered by a variety of caregivers. The relatively inexpensive and non-invasive nature of the invention makes it a simple and practical one to consider implementing in a long term care home.

When interpreting the results of research, a result is called **statistically significant** if it is unlikely to have occurred by chance. "A statistically significant difference" simply means there is statistical evidence that there is a difference in outcomes between a treatment and a control group that had not likely occurred by chance alone. A statistically significant difference, however, does not necessarily mean that the difference is large, important or meaningful in real life and/or in clinical terms.

For more information about this study please contact Sandee Hicks-Moore, MNRN, Associate Professor, Department of Nursing, University of New Brunswick at shicks@unbsj.ca the full article/paper can be purchased through Sage Publications at <http://dem.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/7/1/95>