A Review of the Effectiveness of Reminiscence Therapy on the Cognitive Functioning of Older Adults with Dementia

Search Terms: “Reminiscence therapy,” “dementia,” “older adults,” “cognitive effects,” “RCT”

Years: 2002-2013

Databases: EBSCOHost, Medline, PubMed

Articles: 8

Summary of Research Findings:

This review included six randomized control trials, one case study and one pilot study. All participants were over 65 years old and diagnosed with mild to moderate dementia, who received reminiscence therapy (RT) in individual or group sessions. The length of the studies ranged from eight weeks to one year. Six studies included participants receiving RT while residing in nursing homes (Gudex, Horsted, Moller Jensen, Kjer & Sorensen, 2010; Haslam, Haslam, Jetten, Bevins, Ravenscroft & Tonks, 2010; Ito, Meguro, Akanuma, Ishii & Mori, 2007; Tadaka & Kanagawa, 2007; Thornggreensen, Schweitzer & Orrell, 2002; Wang, 2007). Another study was conducted among subjects living at home but attending an adult day care program (Nawate, Kaneko, Hanahoka & Okamura, 2008). Last was a case study conducted with one man recently diagnosed with dementia living with family (Tanaka, Yamada, Kobayashi, Sonohara, Machida, Nakai, Kozaki, Toba, 2007).

All studies measured the effectiveness of RT as a modality to improve cognitive functioning among older adults with dementia. Some studies found that RT improved or maintained cognitive functioning among the subjects in the intervention group (Haslam, et al., 2010; Nawate, et al., 2008; Tadaka & Kanagawa, 2007; Tanaka, et al., 2007; Wang, 2007), while participants in the control group showed some cognitive decline (Haslam, et al., 2010; Wang, 2007). The literature suggests that the utilization of RT in group settings can promote social interaction which in turn, may contribute to maintained or improved cognitive functioning (Haslam, et al., 2010). Two of the studies also found improved quality of life and job satisfaction among caregivers and nursing home staff respectively (Gudex, et al., 2010; Thornggreensen, Schweitzer & Orrell, 2002).

Knowledge Transition Plan:

RT can be utilized as an intervention to maintain current levels of cognitive functioning and make short-term cognitive improvements. The literature suggests that administration of RT would be more successful in a smaller group when catered towards participants’ interests using specific facilitation techniques. Groups should ideally range from 5-11 people in sessions lasting 30 minutes to one hour (Gudex, et al., 2010; Haslam, et al., 2010; Nawate, et al., 2008; Tadaka
Prior to organizing small groups, it is important for the facilitator to understand the group demographics and participants’ interests. The literature indicated that the use of themes common to participants’ interests were helpful to initiate conversation and trigger long-term memories (Haslam, et al., 2010; Nawate, et al., 2008; Tadaka & Kanagawa, 2007; Tanaka, et al., 2007; Wang, 2007). Facilitation techniques are also important. It is suggested that RT may be useful when integrated into other activities, such as cooking (Nawate, et al., 2008). Practitioners could also train caregivers and family members effective communication techniques that would facilitate RT administration for older adults residing at home. When a group is not available, individual reminiscence also has the ability to improve cognition (Tanaka, et al., 2007).

References: