10 years - **ANNIVERSARY EDITION *TRAKIA JOURNAL OF SCIENCES***
Trakia Journal of Sciences, Vol. 10, No 4, pp 76-79, 2012
Copyright © 2012 Trakia University
Available online at:
http://www.uni-sz.bg

ISSN 1313-7069 (print)
ISSN 1313-3551 (online)

Original Contribution

APPLICATION OF TECHNIQUES ASSISTING THE COMMUNICATION WITH DEMENTIA PATIENTS BY STUDENTS – SOCIAL WORK

B. Petrova[1*], M. Petkova[1], E. Hristakieva[2]

[1]Department of Psychology and Foreign Languages, Medical Faculty, Trakia University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria
[2]Department of Othorinolaringology and Dermatology, Medical Faculty, Trakia University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

ABSTRACT
A review of the results from the work of students – Social works - with dementia patients is made in the present piece of work. 46 students of the Medical Faculty, Thracian University, Stara Zagora, participated in the study. The study methods included: a Clipper-questionnaire of Jennie Powell (1), which served for a detailed analysis of the behavior of dementia patients, a case study on an algorithm prepared in advance for the purposes of the study and a questionnaire prepared for the purposes of the study, with which the students evaluated their work with the patients. The obtained results describe the most frequently encountered activities, in which the people with dementia took part, and the techniques, which the students applied while working with them. The most frequently used techniques assisting the communication with dementia patients were: preparing an individual life profile; communication by using albums with memories; assisting the communication through old memories and versatile knowledge of life; non-verbal communication.

Key words: Dementia; Social work; Communication skills

INTRODUCTION

The dementia is an acquired disease, which progressively affects the memory, the intellect and the personality of the sick person, as it influences the social and the professional activities. As stated by the World Health Organization, a sufficient condition for a diagnosis is mainly the decline of the memory and the thinking, which results in a deterioration of performing personal daily activities (2). Besides the memory, the orientation, the visual-spatial perception of the surroundings, the speech, the motive abilities, the executive functions (planning, organization, and consistency), the emotions and the behavior are considerably affected.

The most frequent types of dementia are the Alzheimer's disease, cerebrovascular and Parkinson's dementia, as well as a series of other states, caused by exchange, toxic, mental and other brain damages. "Alzheimer, the most frequent form of dementia, with 600 000 newly-diagnosed cases per year, exceeds even the newly-found cases of diabetes (500 000)". (3).

Around 4% of the people above 65 and 20% of people who have turned 85 are with some form of dementia. It becomes more frequent with the advance of the age and it is more frequent in women (4).

The great number of people with dementia (80%) lives in the society (5), which provides the abundance of literature on this matter.

Since 1980 the psychologists have announced the results of their work with dementia patients and with the people, who take care of them. They have emphasized the psychological aspects of the dementia, the importance of the cares and the techniques, which are applied (6).

***Correspondence to**:*Bilyana Petrova Department of Psychology and Foreign Languages, Medical Faculty, Trakia University, 6000 Stara Zagora, Bulgaria, tel: 042 664 226 e-mail: biliana.tusz@abv.bg*

The dementia symptoms lead to difficulties in the communication, in self-service and to personality changes.

Jennie Powell, in her practical guide "Helping the old people with dementia" (1), enumerates some of the most frequently met difficulties in the communication with people with dementia:

- The patients asks one and the same question.
- They find it difficult to start a conversation and to keep it up.
- The patients follow a conversation with difficulty, especially when more people are talking.
- The patients cannot recall the names of people, places or objects.
- They cannon follow television broadcasts well.
- They talk of their past all the time.
- The patients claim wrong things.

The most frequent communication problems could be explained with the fact that the people with dementia have difficulties with the mental images and the memories.
Jennie Powell recommends the confrontation to be avoided, to act accordingly and the feelings of the person with dementia to be clarified (1).

The techniques she proposes are the following:

- Communication with the help of an album with memories
- Structuring the daily tasks by using a schedule
- Assisting the communication by means of old memories and versatile knowledge of life
- Communication with the help of television and video
- Adjusting the living environment to the needs of the person with dementia
- Non-verbal communication
- Preparing an individual life profile

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The purpose of the study is to present the most frequently used techniques for improving the communication with the dementia patients by students with subjects "Social works" and "Nurse" and to describe the effectiveness of these techniques in the process of the work of the students with people with dementia.

EXAMINED PERSONS

The examined persons – 46 students of the Medical Faculty, Thracian University, Stara Zagora, were divided into groups as follows:
- by sex: women - 41; men - 5
- by age: up to 25 years old - 39; up to 35 years old - 7
- by subject: Social work - 19; Nurse - 27.

The study was carried out in connection with the implementation of an European project on the Leonardo Da Vinci professional training program, called "Qualification of specialists, spreading knowledge for the care of old people with dementia" in the Medical Faculty of the Thracian University.

The Project was implemented with the participation of higher educational institutions and Non-government organizations from 5 countries of EU:

- Germany, Bulgaria, Spain, Poland, Romania

The goal of the project was the development of a uniform European standard in the training of specialists, taking care of old people with dementia.

STUDY METHODS

1. Clipper- questionnaire of Jennie Powell (1).
2. Analysis of a case study developed in advance by the students according to an algorithm prepared beforehand for the purposes of the study.
3. A questionnaire prepared for the purposes of the study, with which the students evaluated their work on the project.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Each student filled in a Clipper (A Cardiff profile for improving the quality of life of people who are being taken care of for a long period of time) (1). Through the questionnaire, it was paid attention to the fact how one person feels with respect to 41 daily activities. These activities were divided into 8 categories:

- Touching and movement
- Watching and listening
- Taste and sense of smell
- People and animals
- Activities – independently or jointly
- Activities in a group
- Outdoor activities
- Activities – picnic, visits

In order to fill in the questionnaire, the students had to interpret the verbal and non-verbal reactions of the patient, as well as to take into consideration the opinion of the personnel.

The information for all activities was entered into a worksheet.

The activities, which the patient liked, were entered into the first column of the worksheet. The second column documented the activities which the patient did not particularly like. The third column referred to such activities, for which it was not known whether the patient liked or disliked. The activities, which were never carried out, were written in the fourth column.

The filled-in worksheet gave a full idea of the daily life of the patient.

The students worked individually with each patient. They were given the available documentation. They talked with the personnel of the home with respect to the daily life of the patients.

The summarized results show that a great part of the patients (72%) need a person to help them with the daily activities – washing, combing, haircut.

Almost all of the patients (91%) like to have a view towards flowers and plants as well as to listen to natural noises.

All patients like sweets or chocolate.

All patients feel pleased to have visits, to talk to somebody. Part of them (26%) would be happy to have an animal and to fondle it.

Most of the patients (87 %) like to watch television, to look at photos from their past or of their relatives (90 %).

Some patients (35 %) like different types of amusement games.

All patients like the walks outside or like to stay in fresh air, if the weather allows this.

A great part of the patients (73 %) prefer to have guests at home, rather than to be guests at someone's home. They like performances and organized celebrations.

When the students summarized the collected information, they gave suggestions how, by changing the activities, the life of a person with dementia could be made more pleasant and how to improve the quality of his/her life.

2. Each student presented a case study, in which, besides the biography of the patient, he/she also described the patient's behavior and the applied communication techniques.
46 of the students state that the patient did not stop talking of his/her past.
35 of the students state that the patient talked incorrect things.
15 of the students report that the patient called the things with wrong names.
10 of the students announce that the patient strained himself/herself to find the words.
5 of the students report that the patient asked one and the same question all the time.
3 of the students point out that the patient had difficulties with the hearing.

These results could be discussed in connection with the data presented by Jennie Powell (1) for frequently met difficulties in the communication, noticed with people with dementia.

The most frequent techniques used by the students when having communication problems were:

- Communication with the help of albums with memories
- Supporting the communication with the help of old memories and versatile knowledge of life.
- Preparing an individual life profile
- Non-verbal communication

Techniques rarely applied by the students when having communication problems:

- Structuring the tasks for the day with the help of a schedule.
- Directing the person with dementia to a particular task.
- Change of the environment in the home.
- Communication with the help of television and video.

The more rarely used techniques could be interpreted in connection with the fact that it was necessary to spend more time with the patients (structuring the tasks for the day with the help of a schedule; communication with the help of television) or were not within the powers of the students (change of the environment in the home).

3. All students filled in a questionnaire related to their work on the project before starting the practical part of the training and after its completion. In this way, they described their personal experience before the project's start and what was the reason to participate. They pointed out that the project came up to their expectations, also what was the most interesting thing and what difficulties they encountered.

The results show that before the start of the training, 44 of the students had no experience in the work with dementia patients. After the completion of the project, 40 of the students shared they feel well-prepared for working with dementia patients.

The leading motivation for their participation in the project was the certificate obtained for a completed training course (31 students) and the opportunity to take part in a project financed by an European program (16 students).

The expectations of the students were to obtain particular knowledge and skills in the care for old people with dementia. When the project ended, to the question to what extent it came up to their expectations, 29 of the students replied "entirely" and 17 – "almost entirely".

The students pointed out that the experience which they obtained during the practical work with the patients (43 students) was the most interesting and useful thing.

The difficulties which they encountered were mostly communication problems with the dementia patients but the techniques of Jennie Powell (1) helped them to overcome the difficulties (46 students).

As a result of their participation in the project "Qualification of specialists, spreading knowledge of care for old people with dementia", part of the students (17 students) have changed their attitude to the old people, which proves one more time that without knowledge for the advance in the age, the work of the social work specialists is not possible (7).

CONCLUSIONS

1. The Clipper-questionnaire gives the opportunity, by summarizing the information of the patients with dementia, to make a proposal for a change in the activities and for increasing the quality of life.
2. The most frequently used techniques supporting the communication with dementia patients are: preparing an individual life profile; communication with the help of albums with memories; assisting the communication with the help of old memories and versatile knowledge of life; non-verbal communication.
3. The practical work of the students with dementia patients gives the opportunity for a change of the stereotype perception of the old people.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The paper is supported by European Project ADEM - Community vocational training action programme "Leonardo da Vinci", Third phase: 2008 –2010 – Selection Process 2008 PILOT PROJECTS, LANGUAGE COMPETENCES, TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS AGREEMENT 2008 DE/08/LLP-LdV/TOI/147176

REFERENCES

1. Powell, J., Care to communicate. Helping the Older Person with Dementia. A Practical Guide for Careworkers. London, 2000
2. World Health Organization., The ICD-10: The International Classification of Diseases. *Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorders*. WHO, Geneva, 1992
3. Hörandl, F., Ways of communication with dementia people. *Neurology and psychiatry* 1: 11-12, 2009
4. Gerasimov, B., Up-to-date neurology for everybody. Sofia, 2003
5. Nolan, M., Grant, G., and Keady, J., Understanding Family Care. Open University Press, Buckingham, 1996
6. Innes, A., The social and political context of formal dementia care provision. *Ageing and Society*, 22: 483-499, Cambrige University Press, 2002
7. Ivanov, P., The influence of the personality peculiarities of the old people on the organization of the social work with their age group. *Social work problems*, 202-212, Sofia, 2007