

When Words Are Not Enough

Dramatherapy Intervention at STEPS Eating Disorder

Service: A Brief Overview

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Background

- "Some [patients] will prefer a non-verbal projective therapy, using art, drama or music."¹
- Dramatherapy is an HCPC Regulated profession. It has as its main focus the intentional use of healing aspects of theatre and creativity as part of the therapeutic process.²
- Eating disorder sufferers often have poor sense of self and identity, low self-worth, a polarised philosophy of life, and inability to tolerate and integrate emotional states.
- Dramatherapy gives validity to both body and mind and sees a person as a whole, rather than body and mind being separate, it can be a potent source of healing in the field of Eating Disorders.
- The body is used (and abused) as an expression of underlying disturbances in Eating Disorders. Engaging body and mind within Dramatherapy promotes stronger sense of self and understanding of emotion that is expressed through the eating disorder.

Method

A 20-week Dramatherapy group was offered at STEPs for 12 inpatient and outpatients with AN and BN diagnoses in the contemplative stage of change. A Developmental model of Dramatherapy was adopted. EPR theory was used as a framework for treatment, mirroring psychological and psychosocial stages of development.³

Results

- Quantitative and qualitative data was collected using EDQ, PSYCHLOPS⁴ and patient feedback forms
- Higher score indicates higher impairment/ clinical severity
- During the first 4 weeks, 2 patients disengaged.
- Results were collated at the end of therapy, indicating 80% of patients who attended Dramatherapy group improved in PSYCHLOPS scores
- PSYCHLOPS outcomes showed an average score of 14 at start of therapy, with an average score of 8 at end of treatment, with 1 patient remaining at pre therapy score, and 1 increasing score at end of therapy
- Patient feedback forms indicated 70% of patients felt they had met their personal aims
- 100% of patients would attend another group if offered
- All patients expressed value in having a group that focused on the individual as a whole, rather than solely Diagnoses and symptomology

Discussions & Conclusions

- This study points towards the value of non-verbal Arts Therapies in the treatment of Eating disorders, and suggest a link between group Dramatherapy and improvement of mental wellbeing
- Value of feeling of belonging to a group was also evident, and to focus on other areas of life aside from eating disorders, demonstrating the efficacy of an oblique approach to therapy.

Patient Comments and Feedback

- 'I like that the group is not directly about eating disorders, it is about the whole person. It helps express how you feel creatively-its less daunting than therapy I have done before where you just talk about feelings. This group is fun, optimistic and artistic. There should be more groups like this.'
- 'I enjoyed finding my creativity again.'
- 'I felt connected to people even at my most isolated times. It felt like it brought out my personality I had suppressed for a long time. I feel less alone now.'
- 'I would like to do more role-play of real life situations so I can feel prepared for when I leave hospital.'
- 'It felt like an escape from the eating disorder, but I realized by the end you are actually challenging it more than ever.'
- 'It has felt like an important and supportive stepping stone from being an inpatient to outpatient, and been good for my transition back home.'
- 'I did things I never thought I would do- it pushed me out of my comfort zone but that helped me to know I can do other things I am scared of too.'

Consented Artwork created by members of STEPS Dramatherapy Group.



I welcome any questions or feedback at rose.sadowski@nhs.net. Thankyou

1. NICE Guidelines, Eating Disorders; 2018
2. Badth Website, 2019
3. Developmental Model of Dramatherapy; Dr Sue Jennings, 1998
4. PSYCHLOPS; Kings College London