

Dance/Movement Therapy and the Quality of Life for Individuals with Late Stage Dementia: A Clinical Method

Dementia is a global healthcare concern that impacts mostly older adults, and while there is no cure for the disease, there are major approaches being made to slow its progression and improve the quality of life of people who live with dementia. This study explored the impact of a DMT method developed based on principles established by Marion Chace and implemented in a group setting within a residential home. The objective of this study was to analyze the effectiveness of DMT on improving the quality of life for individuals with advanced dementia. The intervention consisted of a series of ten movement activities, five that were led and five that allowed for improved movement. Each session began with a structured warm up, progressed to movements utilizing props such as an Octaband, maracas, and scarves, and concluded with a cool down.

Participants consisted of four individuals over the age of 80 diagnosed with advanced dementia. Over the course of three weeks, three one-hour sessions were conducted to analyze the effectiveness of DMT on improving the quality of life for individuals with advanced dementia.. An inductive analysis was applied to the resulting session notes to tally each emerging theme; first as it was demonstrated by each resident, then as it was demonstrated per session, and finally as it was demonstrated throughout the intervention Themes that emerged were Participant Initiates Touch, Participant Acknowledges Group, Participant Speaks to Me, Participant Smiles or Laughs, Participant is Receptive to Touch, Participant Demonstrates Musicality, Participant Speaks Aloud, Participant Mirrors My Movement, Participant Uses a Prop, Participant Initiates Original Movement, Participant Mirrors Others, Participant Sings or Hums, Participant Acknowledges Me Nonverbally, and Participant Makes Eye Contact. These themes were placed into the categories established in the Quality of Life Movement Assessment for Persons with Advanced Dementia created by Donna Newman-Bluestein (2013): Social Engagement, Engagement in Meaningful Experiences, Self-Expression, and Affect.

This categorization allowed me to gain insight into how the method had an impact on each resident's level of engagement throughout the individual sessions, what types of engagement brought the most signs of quality of life throughout the sessions, and the level of frequency on certain quality of life indicators This qualitative data was analyzed to identify how many Quality of Life (QOL) Indicators were recorded during each activity across all three sessions. Results revealed that participants exhibited the most indicators of quality of life when the activities where set to high energy music, utilized a prop, particularly if the prop offered vibratory feedback, and had moments of one-on-one connection. The data was then analyzed to reveal the top two occurring QOL Categories that emerged during each session activity across all three sessions. What was found was that the most exhibited Quality of Life Category was Engagement in Meaningful Experiences followed by Self-Expression, Social Engagement, and Affect in that order.

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Brianna Berg graduated from Lesley University this year with an MA in DMT. Her undergraduate studies in Kinesiology and internship work with groups including veterans, seniors, and adults with advanced neurocognitive disorders and neurodegenerative disabilities, and dementia inform her passion for broadening the use of DMT principles across diverse populations.