

Why use Doll Therapy? Old Age Psychiatry



Information for Staff

WHAT IS DOLL THERAPY?

Doll Therapy is an evidence based therapeutic intervention used in Dementia care.

It has been shown to reduce distress and improve emotional well-being and communication, in some people with dementia.

Doll therapy is used following assessment and formulation of an individual and their difficulties, by trained members of the staff team.

An understanding is developed based on a persons background/history, personality, character and medical history to inform our understanding of the person.

HOW TO INTRODUCE DOLL THERAPY?

Dolls should be sat upon chairs or small tables within the ward to allow patients to use them should they choose to.

It is the choice of the patient whether the doll is used.

Men should not be discouraged from using a doll, if it has been identified as an appropriate intervention aimed at meeting their needs.

WHY USE DOLL THERAPY?

A psychological formulation may identify a need of the patient which is currently not being met, such as:

- ❖ the need for comfort/affection
- ❖ the need to care for and nurture
- ❖ the need to be busy and work

Doll Therapy can be used to meet these needs and reduce distress, rather than using some medications. However, Doll Therapy is not for everyone.

OTHER HELPFUL HINTS

Refer to the doll by whatever name the person chooses to use, e.g. 'doll', 'baby' etc. To find out how they refer to it, ask "what do you have here?"

Use a variety of dolls with different faces, clothes etc to minimise disputes among those using them.

When having to remove the doll, provide a reason for taking it away, e.g. "I'll have to take the baby away so you can have your dinner in peace."

PRECAUTIONS

Infection control: This can be addressed via an agreed protocol for ensuring the doll and its clothes etc are cleaned regularly.

Triggering of unhappy memories for the patient: This should be monitored by the staff, as well as further assessment completed to understand why.

COMMON CONCERNS

Some people think using dolls is childish and deceptive, but research studies conducted in hospitals and other dementia care settings have shown that doll therapy can be effective in reducing distress.

Further background information and examples of these studies can be accessed via the Internet, or from the psychologist.

CAUTIONARY POINTS

Always ask permission to take the doll away.

Never remove a doll as a punishment.



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