



PSYCHOSOCIAL NEWS:

The SSCIS Psychosocial Strategy for People with a Spinal Cord Injury

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The role of the psychosocial strategy is to assist you in gaining the knowledge and skills you need to effectively support the psychosocial wellbeing of people with SCI.

You know and understand what works for you in your practice setting, so your thoughts and ideas can make a difference.

If you have any ideas on what could assist you in your practice, if you would like to be further involved in specific working groups or have any comments about the strategy, your input is welcome! Please contact your representative on the Steering Group to feedback your thoughts and ideas, or contact the Chair of the Steering Group directly.

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Musings by the SCI Group Therapists by T. Citarelli & C. Ephraums

The Spinal Cord Injury Units at Prince of Wales Hospital (POWH) and Royal Rehabilitation Centre Sydney (RRCS) have now completed delivering the research component of the Effectiveness Coping Group psychological intervention. This initiative is funded by Lifetime Care & Support Authority and being evaluated by the Rehabilitation Studies Unit of the University of Sydney, in collaboration with SSCIS.

The aim of the group program is to improve the provision of psychological education for clients with a spinal cord injury (SCI), to promote a psychosocial model of care and to better balance the psychological and physical components of rehabilitation. The expectation is that early psychological intervention can assist people with a spinal cord injury to be better prepared for the adjustment process after discharge to the community. The intervention was delivered as a group program, over an 18-month period, facilitated by the Clinical Psychologists in each SCI Unit. Six group programs were run at each site, involving 6 sessions, with between three and eight clients per group (N=50). The content of the program consisted of evidence-based psychological intervention strategies with information giving, skills learning, discussion and role play as well as integrative multi-media approaches.

The group psychology skills program provides an ideal opportunity in a nonthreatening environment for teaching clients who are not inclined to engage in learning or practicing psychological adjustment skills taught to them during their individual sessions or who do not participate in individual psychology sessions.

The project group sessions have also provided the Psychologists at POWH & RRCS with the opportunity to gain baseline experience in running a psychological group program for clients with a SCI. Client feedback has been very valuable and will help in planning and design of the mode of delivery and content of future groups. It is envisaged that a group psychology skills program will become a significant component of and embedded into the spinal rehabilitation process.

Client story

A retired woman in her late 50s suffered a paraplegia SCI when attempting suicide. Her significant life stressors after the injury included minimal support from her family, limited interests outside of her family, and a pre history of depression. She stated that engaging in the group psychological therapy as an inpatient substantially enhanced her self-confidence, elevated her self-esteem, and helped her to better adjust to the impairments associated with her injury. The program also helped her modify her perceptions and outlook on life, despite the social restrictions her injury has caused. The group format gave her an opportunity to hear the stories of other group members and an insight into how they were adjusting. She benefited

greatly from cognitive aspects of the program, which taught her to adopt protective mental and behavioural strategies against depressive and sad mood and anxiety. It helped her bond with another similarly aged, but more severely injured woman and they continue to be close, relying on each other for support. Not long after being discharged this woman's husband left her permanently, however she viewed this as a positive situation rather than a catastrophe as she now had the coping skills, strategies and confidence to be the director of her own thoughts and behaviours for optimal quality of life.

Musings—learning from the experience

The Psychologists in both facilities found the group program a valuable and interesting, though challenging, experience in several ways:

- ◆ The weekly sessions were timetabled into the participants' rehabilitation program and most participants required little encouragement to attend the group sessions, although at times the difficulty in getting the client ready in the morning or the 'pull of gym' needed to be managed.
- ◆ Some clients were concerned about reducing their other therapy time in order to attend the group. However, this was not reflected in 'drop out' rates from the group sessions.
- ◆ Some clients wanted to use the group setting to share personal issues which were not relevant to the group program. Managing the participant personalities and the different levels of psychological understanding made the group sessions challenging at times.

Do you need something more?

For further resources on psychosocial aspects of SCI visit

<http://www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/networks/spinal-cord-injury/resources>

where you can download the *Guide for Health Professionals on the Psychosocial Care of People with SCI* and the *Directory of Information and Support*

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- ◆ Initially the program was presented using PowerPoint slides however this led to the participants treating the group session as a lecture rather than an interactive experience. The Psychologists adjusted their presentation style reducing or ceasing use of slide presentations relying instead on experiential methods and group discussion to teach and demonstrate the skills.
- ◆ While keeping the core skills development component, the content of the group program in each facility has changed and developed, reflecting the needs of the clients and the expertise of the Psychologists running the programs.
- ◆ At RRCS a relaxation component was introduced into each session and for some

groups, this was continued after the group program ceased.

From the client's point of view, the challenges included:

- ◆ Motivation to practise outside the group sessions the skills learnt e.g. various coping skills.
- ◆ The daily therapy demands and pain and sleep issues made it difficult for some clients to engage in the group sessions and to follow through with coping skill practise.
- ◆ Finally, the clients who were less psychologically minded found it difficult to relate to some of the skills being taught and preferred to rely on their own coping approaches.

A review of free resources

The Reeve Foundation is dedicated to curing spinal cord injury by funding innovative research, and improving the quality of life for people living with paralysis through grants, information and advocacy. The site promotes health and well being of people with SCI, mobility, impairment, and paralysis by providing comprehensive information, resources. Follow the link and www.christopherreeve.org check out the apps.

The MHS aims to promote positive attitudes about mental health and mental illness, and to stimulate debate that will challenge the boundaries of present knowledge and ideas about mental health care.

www.mindhealthconnect.org.au

FREE Apps

For free to download Apps search on the Apple App Store:

- ⇒ Search for 'SCIA' for free App to access information about life with a SCI. Also available at www.scia.org.au/ or call 1800819775
- ⇒ Search for 'ParaQuad' for free App of the *When Spinal Injury Affects You* fact sheets and other helpful resources for people with a SCI. Also available on <http://paraquad.org.au/>

Mental Health Connect (MHS) - The MHS is a not for profit learning network for improving mental health services in Australasia. The MHS mission is to: 1) Recognize and promote quality collaborative research, practice, policy-making and education. 2) Promote active involvement and inclusion of all mental health stakeholders and 3) advocate and promote leadership in the mental health field.

The MHS provides a forum for the exchange of ideas, professional development, networking and debate for professionals, consumers, carers (families), and managers.

What's new?

- 1) **PARAQUAD** has been awarded a LTCSA grant for the *Self Care@ Home Project*.
- 2) The following sections of the **Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's Mental Health Services in Australia** website have been updated:

<http://mhsa.aihw.gov.au>

- ◇ Psychiatric disability support services
- ◇ Workforce
- ◇ Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHaMs)

Dates for your diary

21-23 August 2013

The ANZSCoS 2013 Annual Scientific Conference *SCI New Solutions in a Changing World* will be held in Sydney on 21-23 August.

<http://www.dconferences.com.au/anzscos2013>

Themes of the conference include

- ◇ Health information technology & education
- ◇ Models & planning for life/care transitions
- ◇ Health partnerships & shared decision making
- ◇ Services for complex co-morbidities
- ◇ Psychosocial considerations, family & carer support.