Activity 3 - Enhancing empathy to overcome communication barriers and support emotional expression in patients with neurological conditions like Parkinson's disease and multiple sclerosis

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ROMANIAN ALZHEIMER SOCIETY















PROJECT NUMBER: 2023-1-R001-KA220-ADU-000160973

Active learning activity - description

Module	Module 1. The main mental health disorders in old age
	(cognitive decline, dementia and Alzheimer disease, other
	neurological disorders - e.g. multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's
	disease): symptoms, warning signs, stages
Chapter	Other neurological disorders
Name of activity	Enhancing empathy to overcome communication barriers
	and support emotional expression in patients with
	neurological conditions like Parkinson's disease and
	multiple sclerosis
OBJECTIVE(S)	Help participants develop empathy and communication
	skills, learning how to overcome communication barriers,
	express emotions in a healthy way and support emotional
	expression inpatients with neurological conditions like
	Parkinson's disease and multiple sclerosis.
METHODS	The workshop utilizes pantomime, nonverbal
	communication, and guided discussion to enhance
	participants' understanding of empathy and communication
	strategies when interacting with individuals who have
	Parkinson's Disease or multiple sclerosis. This methodology
	is designed to be flexible and adaptable for both online and
	in-person formats, ensuring accessibility and engagement
	for all participants.
TIME ALLOCATED	40 minutes
RESOURCES NEEDED	Space for movement
	Emotion cards (cards with different emotions written on
	them)
	Timer
	Role-play scenarios

















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	Webinar platforms (e.g. Microsoft teams, zoom, google	
	meet)	
	Notebooks or flipchart for group observations and	
	conclusions	
INSTRUCTIONS*	Introduction	
	Emotional Awareness Exercise	
	Role Play Exercise - Overcoming Communication Barriers	
	Empathic Communication Techniques	
	Closing Exercise and Reflection	
REFERENCES		
HANDOUTS	Emotion cards (cards with different emotions written on	
	them)	
	Quick scenarios for Emotion Recognition	
	Role-play scenarios	

* Full instructions:

Enhancing empathy to overcome communication barriers and support emotional expression in neurological conditions like Parkinson's disease and multiple sclerosis

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

Theme Presentation:

The facilitator explains the importance of empathy in social interactions, especially in the context of communicating with people who have difficulty expressing emotions.





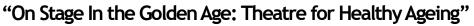














Empathy is crucial for connecting with others, especially when communicating with people who may struggle to express their emotions. By putting ourselves in their shoes, we open a path for deeper understanding, patience, and support. This workshop will explore how empathy can help us overcome communication barriers, allowing us to build stronger, more meaningful relationships.

Opening Question:

"What does empathy mean to you, and how do you think it can influence relationships with people experiencing the challenges of neurological conditions like Parkinson's or MS?"

2. Emotional Awareness Exercise (10 minutes)

Emotion Cards Distribution:

Each participant receives cards with different emotions (e.g., frustration, sadness, confusion, joy, fear).

Quick Scenarios:

The facilitator reads several brief scenarios related to interactions with people with Parkinson's or MS.

















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Examples of scenarios:

Symptom	Scenario	Emotion
Tremor-Induced	During a family dinner, the	Embarrassment and
Insecurity	individual tries to use a	insecurity as they notice
	spoon but keeps spilling	others watching.
	their food.	
Chronic fatigue	The patient explains to a	Numbness and apathy,
and Emotional	friend, "I'm so tired all the	where constant exhaustion
Numbness	time that I can't even feel	dulls their ability to engage
	excited or happy about	with life and relationships.
	things anymore."	
Physical weakness	The patient struggles to put	Sense of defeat and loss of
	on a shirt by themselves	motivation as once-simple
	and, feeling exhausted,	tasks become overwhelming.
	sighs, "I don't see the point	
	in even trying anymore" then	
	repeatedly apologizes to	
	their daughter, saying, "I'm	
	sorry for being a burden."	
Speech Struggle	The person attempts to	Sadness, and a sense of
and Isolation	share a story with friends,	isolation.
	but their words come out	

















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	slowly, and people struggle to understand.	
Muscle Rigidity	Trying to reach for a glass	Loss of independence and
and Dependence	on a high shelf, they find	slight irritation.
	their arm won't extend as	
	needed and must ask	
	someone for help. The	
	patient whispers, "Why	
	should I even try? I'm not	
	good for anything anymore."	
Memory Gaps and	In the middle of a	Confusion and
Confusion	conversation, they forget	embarrassment.
	what they were talking about	
	and stumble over words.	
Loss of Fine	The patient watches	Resentment and envy,
Motor Skills	someone else perform a	missing the ease with which
	simple task like buttoning a	they once performed
	shirt and mutters, "I used to	everyday tasks.
	do that without a second	
	thought. It's just not fair."	
Difficulty	At a restaurant, the person	Embarrassment and anxiety.
Swallowing	chokes on their food briefly,	
	which draws concerned	

















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Chronic fatigue	looks from others at the table. The patient shares their excitement about a new supplement they hope will boost their energy, saying, "Maybe this will finally give me the strength to do	Optimism and hope that new treatments might help them regain some independence.
Chronic illness fatigue	The patient notices the caregiver looks tired and says, "I know it's hard for you too. I'm sorry you have to go through this."	Mutual empathy and compassion, recognizing the shared toll of the disease on relationships and daily life.

Examples of Emotions and Lessons for Participants:

Isolation: The disease can lead to social withdrawal due to difficulty connecting with others. Participants learn how they can offer support and inclusion.

Anger and frustration: These are natural reactions to loss of control.

Participants learn not to take these reactions personally and to respond with understanding.



















Fear and confusion: Feelings of uncertainty are common and can be managed through clear information and emotional support.

Guilt and shame: Acknowledging and accepting these feelings can help the patient feel more comfortable and valued.

Mutual empathy: Recognize moments when patients show concern for caregivers and respond with appreciation.

Emotion Identification:

After each scenario, participants hold up the emotion card they feel is most relevant to the situation described.

This activity helps participants observe the varied and complex emotions of patients with Parkinson's and develop empathic strategies for responding in a way that supports open communication and mutual support.

3. Role Play Exercise - Overcoming Communication Barriers (15 minutes)

Communication Scenarios:

Each group of participants receives a scenario that illustrates a communication barrier (e.g., someone who doesn't feel listened to, someone who is afraid to express feelings of frustration).

Roles:

Participants play the roles of "caregiver" and "person with Parkinson's or MS" (or others as relevant) to explore how they can overcome communication barriers.

















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Example Scenarios:

Scenario	Description
Lack of empathy	A person with Parkinson's feels unheard by their caregiver and emotionally withdraws. The caregiver must express their desire to understand and create a safe space for expressing emotions.
Repeated	A person with MS feels their caregiver doesn't truly
misunderstanding	understand what they're saying due to speech difficulties.
S	The caregiver tries to show patience and adjust their
	language to improve communication.
Lack of	The patient wants to perform certain tasks independently,
independence	but the caregiver intervenes each time out of concern for
	their safety. This frustrates the patient, who withdraws
	from conversation. The caregiver needs to recognize the
	patient's need for independence and negotiate a balance.
Unexpressed	A person with Parkinson's avoids expressing sadness or
feelings	worry about the future, not wanting to burden their family.
	The caregiver encourages them to speak openly and
	creates a safe space for emotional expression.
Social pressure	The patient refuses to attend a social gathering due to
	anxiety about possible tremors or speech difficulties. The
	caregiver needs to show empathy and find ways to reduce
	anxiety and provide support.

















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Sudden mood	One day, the patient is more irritable than usual and
change	rejects help. The caregiver, confused, tries to understand
	the cause of frustration and offers space for expression.
Need for validation	The person with MS feels discouraged and expresses fear
	of no longer being useful. The caregiver must validate
	these feelings and offer genuine encouragement without
	minimizing the patient's experiences.
Frustration with	The patient feels ashamed and frustrated at difficulties
physical	with daily activities. The caregiver, while wanting to help,
limitations	must find a way to support without increasing feelings of
	helplessness.
Refusal to accept	The person with Parkinson's insists on handling tasks
help	alone but clearly needs assistance. The caregiver must find
	a way to help without undermining their autonomy.
Need for privacy	The patient wishes to discuss intimate or sensitive issues
and confidentiality	without the caregiver being too intrusive. The caregiver
	must respect the patient's desire to maintain certain
	boundaries and show they are available to provide support
	as needed.





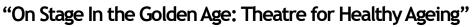














Discussion:

After each role play, the group discusses which techniques worked to overcome barriers and facilitate communication.

4. Empathic Communication Techniques (5 minutes)

The facilitator offers several strategies to address communication barriers, including:

Strategy	Description
Active Listening	Be fully attentive to what the other person is saying without interrupting or thinking of responses. This helps the person feel understood and valued.
Open-Ended Questions	Ask questions that encourage the person to express emotions and thoughts (e.g., "How does that make you feel?").
Emotion Validation	Acknowledge and accept the other person's feelings without judgment.
Emotion Reflection	Restate or rephrase what the other person has said to show you understand, for example, "From what you're saying, I understand you feel frustrated because" This helps confirm feelings and encourages further expression.
Simplified Language	Use short, clear, and direct sentences to avoid confusion and make the conversation easier to follow.

















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	Observe facial expressions, tone of voice, and body
Nonverbal Language	language, which can often convey more about
Awareness	someone's emotional state than words alone.
Provide Time to	Give the person ample time to respond without
Respond	pressure, as speech difficulties may make immediate
	responses challenging.
Clarifying and	Reformulate unclear statements and ask for
Paraphrasing	confirmation ("So, you meant that?") to reduce
	misunderstandings.
Constructive Self-	Encourage openness by modeling honesty. For example,
Disclosure	"I know I sometimes seem anxious, but I'm here for you
	and want to understand."
Calm and	A warm, empathic tone can reduce tension and make
Encouraging Tone	the conversation feel more open.

5. Closing Exercise and Reflection (5 minutes)

Sharing Ideas:

Participants discuss lessons learned and how they plan to apply these techniques in their daily relationships.

Reflection Questions:

"How do you feel about expressing your emotions after this workshop?"



















"What concrete steps will you take to improve communication with people in your life?"

Activity Evaluation

Participants can complete a short questionnaire at the end to evaluate what they have learned about empathy and overcoming communication barriers.

Activity Structure (Adapted for Online)

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

Present the theme and opening question via a shared screen. Use the chat for initial reflections.

2. Emotional Awareness Exercise (10 minutes)

Share emotion cards digitally (images or words on a shared slide). Use brief scenarios, encouraging participants to hold up the digital emotion card they feel matches each situation (use Zoom reactions or chat).

3. Role Play Exercise (15 minutes)

Divide participants into breakout rooms. Share a digital document with role-play scenarios.

Participants take turns as "caregiver" and "patient," discussing their responses in small groups.

4. Empathic Communication Techniques (5 minutes)

Share a slide with strategies and invite participants to comment on which techniques resonate most. Use the chat to discuss practical examples.

















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5. Closing Reflection (5 minutes)

Use a poll for final reflections or a chat discussion with final questions.

Online Adaptation Tips

Use virtual whiteboards for group observations.

Share a digital notebook with scenarios and materials before the session.

Encourage the use of reaction emojis for quick, interactive responses during discussions.

















"ON STAGE IN THE GOLDEN AGE: THEATRE FOR HEALTHY AGEING"

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