COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN THE TRAINING OF PSYCHIATRISTS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF CURRENT APPROACHES

A range of communication skills training programmes have been developed targeting trainees in various medical specialties, predominantly in oncology but to a lesser extent in psychiatry. Effective communication is fundamental to the assessment and treatment of psychiatric conditions, but there has been less attention to this in clinical practice for psychiatrists in training. This review examines the outcomes of communication skills training interventions in psychiatric specialty training.

The heterogeneity of communication skills training is a barrier to evaluating the efficacy of different communication skills training programmes. Further validation studies examining specific models and frameworks would support a stronger evidence base for communication skills training in psychiatry. It remains a challenge to develop research to investigate behaviour change over time in clinical practice or to measure patient outcomes due to the effects of communication skills training.


Pursuing the second ipsilateral gland during minimally invasive video-assisted parathyroidectomy

In patients with primary hyperparathyroidism (PHPT) and preoperative imaging suggesting a solitary parathyroid adenoma (SPA), focused parathyroidectomy is most often curative. Even so, large studies show up to 3% of patients experience persistent or recurrent PHPT. Unilateral neck exploration (UNE) aiming to identify the SPA and the other ipsilateral parathyroid may reduce this failure rate. Minimally invasive video-assisted (MIVA) UNE allows identification of the second ipsilateral parathyroid in about half the patients. This approach helped to diagnose and treat unexpected multi-gland disease in almost 5% of patients.


Recognising the communication gap in Indigenous health care

The communication gap between health professionals and Indigenous Australians has a significant impact on health outcomes. Indigenous patients can have poor health literacy and need careful explanation of procedures, with the assistance of Aboriginal health workers, visual aids and family members. Limited health literacy is not confined to Indigenous people, but it is greatly magnified for speakers of Indigenous languages in comparison, for example, to non-English speaking migrants from countries where a scientific approach to medicine is practised and where these health concepts are already codified. The close interdependence of language and culture amplifies the gap, such that communication difficulties in these communities run deeper than language barriers alone.


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DOES BRIEF CHRONIC PAIN MANAGEMENT EDUCATION CHANGE OPIOID PRESCRIBING RATES?

This brief training package for early-career general practitioners, failed to increase overall opioid cessation. The inconsistency of these actual prescribing results with ‘hypothetical’ prescribing behaviour suggests that reducing opioid prescribing in chronic non-cancer pain requires more than changing knowledge and attitudes.


WHO IS MORE LIKELY TO USE THE INTERNET FOR HEALTH BEHAVIOR CHANGE?

An online tool was used to survey 897 orthopedic trauma patients from two public hospitals in NSW on their interest in using the Internet for health interventions. A total of 52% of respondents had at least weekly internet access and more than half reported interest in using the Internet for health. Odds of at least weekly Internet usage were higher if the individual was born overseas, had a tertiary education, or was a non-smoker. Interest in using the Internet for health increased with high school or tertiary education, and if household incomes were more than AUS $100,000. Older individuals were less interested in using the Internet for health.


APPROPRIATENESS OF PHYSICAL CONTACT WITH CLIENTS WHO HAVE SCHIZOPHRENIA

The purposes of this article are to review the literature on client/practitioner physical contact, consider the issue in the context of working with clients who have schizophrenia, and provide a list of practice recommendations for social workers.


TRIAL OF CANNABIDIOL FOR DRUG-RESISTANT SEIZURES IN THE DRAVET SYNDROME

The Dravet syndrome is a complex childhood epilepsy disorder that is associated with drug-resistant seizures and a high mortality rate. In this double-blind, placebo-controlled trial, 120 children and young adults with the Dravet syndrome and drug-resistant seizures were randomly assigned to receive either cannabidiol oral solution at a dose of 20 mg/kg of body weight per day or placebo, in addition to standard antiepileptic treatment. The median frequency of convulsive seizures per month decreased from 12.4 to 5.9 with cannabidiol, as compared to a decrease from 14.9 to 14.1 with placebo. The percentage of patients who had at least a 50% reduction in convulsive-seizure frequency was 43% with cannabidiol and 27% with placebo. Adverse events occurred more frequently, and there were more withdrawals from the trial in the cannabidiol group, compared to the placebo group.

SOURCE: Devinsky, O. et al. (2017) Trial of cannabidiol for drug-resistant seizures in the Dravet syndrome. NEJM, 376(11), 1035-2020

SEE ALSO – Comment in MJA: Hard data emerges for cannabis in epilepsy

IN THE NEWS

100-YEAR-OLD TECHNIQUE REDUCES NEED FOR IVF

South Australian-led research published in the NEJM has found that a century-old technique has significant benefits for fertility, giving infertile couples an opportunity to achieve a successful pregnancy without the need for in-vitro fertilization (IVF), and at a fraction of the cost. The H2O2 Study compared the benefits of flushing the fallopian tubes of 1119 women with either an oil-based iodised solution of fatty acids from poppy seeds or a water based solution. The procedure known as hysterosalpingography was first carried out in 1917, and since the 1950s, both water-based and oil-based solutions have been used. Almost 40% of infertile women in the oil group and 29% of infertile women in the water group achieved successful pregnancies within 6 months of the technique being performed.

SOURCE: Dreyer, K. et al. (2017) Oil-based or water-based contrast for hysterosalpingography in infertile women. NEJM, 376(21), 2043-2052

TEST OF TIME: HISTORY OF CLOCK DRAWING

The clock drawing test (CDT) has become one of the most widely used cognitive screening instruments in clinical and research settings. Its effectiveness, acceptability, and quick and easy administration have made it a staple for cognitive screening in dementia and a wide range of brain disorders. While McDonald Critchley’s well-known textbook from 1953, The Parietal Lobes, is often cited as the first mention of the CDT, its record use actually stretches back more than a century to 1915.


EFFECTIVENESS & COST-EFFECTIVENESS OF UNSUPERVISED BUPRENORPHINE-NALOXONE FOR THE TREATMENT OF HEROIN DEPENDENCE IN A RANDOMIZED WATLISIT CONTROLLED TRIAL

Access to opioid agonist treatment can be associated with extensive waiting periods with significant health and financial burdens. This local study found that when compared to remaining on a waitlist, weekly take-home self-administered buprenorphine-naloxone treatment is associated with significant reductions in heroin use for people with DSM-IV-TR heroin dependence (n=50). Treatment was also associated with reductions in crime and improvements in quality of life and mental health. This cost-effective approach may be an efficient strategy to enhance treatment capacity.


DRUG & ALCOHOL CLINICAL SERVICES

SEE ALSO – Comment in MJA: Protecting pain patients: the evaluation of a chronic pain educational intervention
DISPARITIES IN EXPERIENCES & OUTCOMES OF HOSPITAL CARE BETWEEN ABORIGINAL & NON-ABORIGINAL PATIENTS IN NSW

Editorial based on a report from the Bureau of Health Information which highlights differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal patients’ experiences in NSW hospitals, particularly in terms of interpersonal aspects of care, coordination and integration, and patient-reported outcomes.


CARDIAC CARE FOR INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

Indigenous Australians have a much higher burden of cardiovascular disease, which occurs at an earlier age than in the non-Indigenous population. Comorbidities such as diabetes are common. Early diagnosis of ischaemic heart disease may be difficult because of barriers such as distance to medical centres, communication problems and family and cultural responsibilities.


ASSOCIATION OF SES IN CHILDHOOD WITH LV STRUCTURE & DIASTOLIC FUNCTION IN ADULTHOOD

1871 people from Finland who reported family socioeconomic status (SES) at ages 3-18 years, were evaluated for left ventricular (LV) structure and function 31 years later. Family SES in childhood was associated with higher LV mass and poorer diastolic function in middle age.


Disadvantaged women at greater risk of heart attack

Researchers from the George Institute for Global Health reviewed 116 studies involving data from 22 million people from North America, Europe, Asia and Australasia. Results suggest that lower socio-economic status was associated with an increased risk of coronary heart disease, stroke and cardiovascular disease for both sexes, but women from more disadvantaged backgrounds were relatively more likely to suffer from coronary heart disease than men from similar backgrounds.


SEE ALSO: Women’s health: a new global agenda, a policy paper which highlights the need for a gendered approach to the collection and use of health data.