

Improving Treatment Effectiveness Through Development of Therapeutic Alliance

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Disclosures

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The presenters have no proprietary interest in any product, instrument, device, service, or material discussed.

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Introduction



Learning objectives

- Define therapeutic alliance
- Discuss evidence regarding therapeutic alliance from the literature
- Identify strategies to develop therapeutic alliance in the clinical setting

Interactive survey

Joe's story

Joe has received an order for outpatient speech therapy. While taking his case history during the evaluation, you inquire if he has worked with an SLP before. He answers quickly and confidently, "No." You are curious about this response because you know he was referred from inpatient rehabilitation. When you inquire further, the patient states, "Oh yes, they came and did their silly games and played "pick the word" and all that. They tried to work with me. *But I never worked with them.*"

What is therapeutic alliance

“Therapeutic alliance refers to the collaboration between the client and the therapist in their effort to combat the client’s problems.” (Sherer, et al., 2007)

1. Client and clinician agreement on treatment tasks
2. Client and clinician agreement on goals of treatment
3. Interpersonal bond between both parties
4. *Common Factors Model*

Without therapeutic alliance



Stronger with therapeutic alliance



Why is therapeutic alliance important?

- About 10,000 people will turn 65 each day from now until the year 2030. One in five people in the United States will be over age 65 and by 2050 the aging population will increase from 72 million to 89 million (CDC, 2013, p. 1)
- By the year 2020, Medicare spending is estimated to increase to \$903 billion, from \$555 billion in 2011 (CDC, 2013, p. 5).

Why? (continued)

- According to the American Heart Association, over 795,000 people have a stroke annually of which about 46% have cognitive deficits and 19% of the cases result in language deficits such as aphasia (Go, et al., 2012, p. e138),
- The direct and indirect cost of stroke in the United States was estimated at \$38.6 billion (Go, et al., 2012, p. e139).

Why? (continued)

- “Among persons under age 65, 17.8% (47.7 million) were in families having problems paying medical bills in the first 6 months of 2014” (Cohen, 2015, p. 1).

What does all this mean?

- Projected need for services will grow
- Projected need for financial resources to pay for treatment will grow.
- Historically, financial support for treatment has decreased through major payor sources (Medicare).
- Patients need to be able to maximize their treatment dollars and opportunity to progress.

Research in Psychotherapy

- Clinicians themselves play a role in the success of the therapeutic process:

“relational variables are commonly the strongest predictors of therapeutic outcomes”

“In most clinical programs, those qualities have taken a back seat to cognitive abilities and measures of traditional academic performance”

(Anderson, et al., 2016)

Research in Rehabilitation

Clinicians believe that including patients in goal setting and treatment planning can have positive effects on patient engagement, unfortunately the act of incorporating the patient in this process may not happen (McCurtin & Clifford, 2015).

“Effective clinicians build a productive therapeutic relationship with their clients” (Plexico, et al., 2010)

Effect on therapeutic outcomes

- Influences motivation and engagement
- Influences perceived competence of clinician
- Influences progress in treatment

What do we know but don't know that we know

Surveyed SLPs in the rehabilitation setting:

- Identify importance of working client-clinician relationships
- Identify goal setting as a key component in patient engagement
- Indicate lack of formal training in strategies to support patient engagement and motivation

(Preliminary results Weatherill, 2017)



Promoting therapeutic alliance

“It is known that communication does not rely only on what is said, but also on the manner or style in which it is expressed, incorporating interplay between verbal and non-verbal factors.”

(Pinto et al, 2012)

Treatment application

- Goal setting
- Choosing Treatment Tasks
- Improving interpersonal communication
 - Verbal
 - Nonverbal
 - Interaction styles

Application to practice

- Therapeutic alliance is closely linked to patient motivation and engagement in treatment
- Goals should be attainable and relevant. A person may view an activity as irrelevant to their goals and demonstrate decreased motivation if they do not understand the rationale for the goals or activity (Hersh, et al., 2012; Maclean & Pound, 2000).

Case discussion

- [Case discussion](#) 0-1:24

Key take-aways

- Demand for services will increase while funding for such services is likely to become more limited.
- Patients need to maximize their opportunities for progress.
- Therapeutic alliance is closely linked to patient motivation and engagement in treatment
- Goal setting that incorporates client and clinician input
- Formation of strong working client-clinician relationships is critical



Questions?



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