

Art Therapy and the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic: Public Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being

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Abstract

Introduction: Hilton published a manuscript [2020] titled; Do researchers have their heads in the clouds, bogged down with scientific medical detail? [Art therapy maybe a simpler alternative]. It discusses how a diagnostic pathway maybe crucial to eliminate sinister reasons for stress [example insomnia possibly caused by sleep apnoea where breathing stops during sleep]. In many cases of stress, depression, and/or anxiety-job, work, family, financial stress or reasons such as COVID-19 maybe causal. Art therapy maybe an alternative option and Hilton's manuscript lists seven publications [review, meta-analysis, clinical trial or case study] providing evidence.

Methods: The Australian yellow pages online directory was searched-search terms [art therapist/s and/or art therapy]. 107 hits were retrieved, 21 were art therapists with email whom were emailed details of the manuscript, in addition to being asked 'Are you currently doing any art therapy work with clients related to the COVID-19 pandemic?'

Results: In reply to the question above, 7 people replied stating 'yes' while 3 replied stating 'no'. 6 did not reply. The results suggest some art therapists are consulting with clients with COVID-19 related stress, anxiety or depression. Art therapy works created maybe displayed at exhibitions such as the black dog art exhibition that focuses on depression and anxiety. Either this year or next year Hilton is entering an art creation as a tribute to Dr. Li Wenliang an ophthalmologist whom passed away of coronavirus.

Conclusion: World Mental Health and RUOK days should incorporate messages about art therapy effectiveness.

Keywords

Art therapy; Coronavirus; Mental health.

Introduction

There are numerous clinical research studies that report art therapy benefit as it relates to a number of clinical objective and subjective outcomes. Hilton's presentation [1] and manuscript [2] included a literature review listing research on art therapy that reported positive outcomes: for people with psychosis [3], for healing trauma among refugee youth [4], stroke patients in their rehabilitation process [5], Alzheimer's disease and other dementias [6], non-psychotic mental health disorders [7], type 1 diabetes mellitus [8] and depression and cognitive function of the elderly [9].

An outbreak of pneumonia of previously unknown aetiology was reported in Wuhan, China in Dec 2019 and a novel coronavirus was identified as causative [10]. Coronavirus [COVID-19] causes a severe pneumonia characterized by fever, cough and shortness of breath [11].

The novel coronavirus disease spread quickly nationwide [12]. As of Feb 11, 2020, as reported in China's Infectious Disease Information System, 1386 counties across all 31 provinces were affected. Gulati and colleagues in 2020 reported that the global pandemic as of April 2020 had spread to over 210 countries, with 2,400,000 confirmed cases and over 170,000 deaths [11]. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control on the 26th September reports 32 613 844 cases of COVID-19 worldwide and 989 728 deaths worldwide [13].

The worldwide pandemic is causing extreme mental, physical and financial hardship and many people are using different therapies for ways to alleviate stress, depression and anxiety.

Methods

The Australian yellow pages online directory was searched-search terms [art therapist/s and/or art therapy]. 107 hits were retrieved, 21 were art therapists with email [others were massage therapy, counselling, psychotherapy, or alternative therapies]. These 21 were emailed details of Hilton's manuscript, in addition to being asked 'Are you currently doing any art therapy work with clients related to the COVID-19 pandemic?'. Follow up phone calls were made.

Results

The replies were as follows; 7 art therapists replied stating 'yes' while 3 replied stating 'no'. 6 did not reply.

Discussion

These results have also been presented as an e-poster at the Australian Public Health Conference, as titled; Art therapy and the COVID-19 pandemic-public mental health and well-being [14]. In addition, this e-poster was an award finalist for best e-poster award, whereby five abstracts from each award category were selected as finalists.

The results suggest some art therapists are consulting with clients with COVID-19 related stress, anxiety or depression. As the pandemic continues worldwide art, music, exercise or relaxation therapy will be crucial for many people in order to deal with stress and the physical, emotional and financial impact of lockdown and quarantine. Art therapy works created maybe displayed at exhibitions such as the black dog art exhibitions that focus on depression and anxiety [15]. The Black Dog Community Art Project is a free community art exhibition, showcasing creativity as a powerful source of healing during periods of depression and anxiety [15]. The author whom has attended in previous years was advised that this year in 2020 it was to be a virtual exhibition, however as yet the date has not been confirmed. If indeed it doesn't proceed this year, she will plan to enter this next year in 2021 as a display. Hilton has prepared an art creation, a suited mannequin, surrounded by protective masks, gloves, sanitizer, eyewear and signage depicting outrage associated with; Wuhan whistle-blower Doctor [Dr. Li Wenliang] an ophthalmologist arrested for rumormongering, altering people of potential serious outbreak. He subsequently died of coronavirus (Figures 1 and 2)

Figure 1 The Black Dog Community Art Project—art creation by D. Hilton [Dr Li Wenliang tribute] [15]..



Figure 2 Logo of Black Dog Community Art Project



The results suggest some art therapists are consulting with clients with COVID-19 related stress, anxiety or depression. As the pandemic continues worldwide; art, music, exercise or relaxation therapy will be crucial for many people in order to deal with stress and the physical, emotional and financial impact of lockdown and quarantine.

Dr Li Wenliang [12.10.1986-7.2.2020] was a Chinese ophthalmologist at Wuhan Central Hospital. Late in Dec 2019, he posted on a WeChat group to his medical colleagues details about seven confirmed cases of SARS reported to the hospital from Huanan seafood market and later posted reports, CT images and confirmation that it was coronavirus. These WeChat messages were shared on the Chinese Internet, and he was summoned by the hospital, which blamed him for leaking information and he was subsequently dubbed a 'whistleblower'. On 3 January 2020, Wuhan police summoned and interrogated him & warned him issuing him a formal written warning for he was making false comment on the Internet. He contracted the virus on 8 Jan 2020. He died of the novel coronavirus infection at an intensive care unit on 7 Feb 2020, at age 33. The Chinese government later exonerated & issued a solemn apology to the family.

Writing on the pillowslip-chronology of events

World Mental Health Day is 10/10/20 and is a day for global mental health education, awareness and advocacy. R U OK? Day is 10/9/20 [R U O K], but is now a year-round call, in that every day is a day to support people that maybe having a difficult time and struggling.

Conclusion

World Mental Health and RUOK days should incorporate messages about art therapy effectiveness.

Take-Home Message

Evidence for effectiveness of art therapy treatment is documented in the literature and during 2020 a number of art therapists indicate clients are consulting with them regarding mental health and the COVID-19 pandemic.

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