

Psychomotor Therapy and Psychiatry: What's in a Name?

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Abstract: In Belgium and the Netherlands, psychomotor therapy as a kind of physical activity and body-oriented therapy has been well integrated into mental health care since 1965. In contrast to its acceptance in most European countries, the term "psychomotor therapy" has not found its way into the Anglo-Saxon literature. Psychomotor therapy is defined as a method of treatment that uses body awareness and physical activities as cornerstones of its approach. In Flemish psychiatric hospitals, psychomotor therapy is included in different treatment programmes for different diagnosis related patient settings. The purpose of this article is to summarize the history, the practical implementations, and the research concerning psychomotor therapy. Its relationship to other similar approaches is described. With this article, we hope to cross borders and build bridges between different international interventions with the same background.

Keywords: Psychomotor therapy, complementary therapy, physical activity, body awareness.

INTRODUCTION

Today, scientific and non-scientific literature is paying a lot of attention to the importance of movement and physical activities for people with mental illness. The relation between mental health and physical activity is underpinned by a growing number of articles concerning the obviousness of physical activity in regard to mental health and psychiatric rehabilitation. These efforts are, however, becoming very slowly integrated into clinical practice. Many mental health professionals do not appear to view physical activity as a worthwhile strategy. The discrepancy between theory and practice is an intriguing observation given that (a) approximately one-fourth of the world population is faced with a mental dysfunction and (b) physical activities and body health are "hot topics" in the western society.

Physical activity has also been shown to enhance the effectiveness of psychological therapies. It has a role in improving quality of life and symptom management for people with a wide range of mental health problems. Physical activity has a two-fold benefit, since people with mental health problems are also at increased risk of a range of physical health problems, including cardiovascular diseases, endocrine disorders, and obesity [1-10]. Today, little by little more psychiatrists become convinced that medication, counselling and physical activities are the basic standards for therapy in mental illness.

The purpose of this article is to describe psychomotor therapy (PMT) and the use of physical activities and body awareness exercises in people with mental illness in Belgium (Flanders), the Netherlands, and other European countries. Its history, relationship to other similar approaches, practical

implementations, and research will be elaborated. The term "psychomotor therapy" has not found its way to the Anglo-Saxon literature, although it is common in most European countries. An international comparison is difficult because in European countries, the domain of physical activity in mental health is claimed by several health care providers with different names and educational backgrounds. With this article, we hope to cross borders and build bridges between different interventions with the same goal.

DEFINITION

Psychomotor therapy is based on a holistic view of the human being. This view is drawn from the unity of body and mind. The notion integrates the cognitive, emotional, and physical aspects and the capacity of being and acting in a psychosocial context [11].

Physical activity in all its forms and corporeality are the central themes. Although physical activities have somatic effects (on morphological, muscular, cardiorespiratory, metabolic, and motor levels), psychomotor therapy is still mainly considered to be a psychological treatment. The relation between patient and psychomotor therapist is a central aspect. The experiences during PMT and the responses that arise through these experiences function as a dynamic power of change [12].

Psychomotor therapy is considered as a complementary therapy and can be embedded in several psychotherapeutic approaches (behaviour, cognitive, or psychodynamic therapy). It incorporates medical, psychological, agogic, kinesiological, and rehabilitative components.

HISTORY

The term "psychomotor" has its origin in Germany. Wilhelm Griesinger, one of the founders of neuropsychiatry, used the term for the first time in 1844 [13].

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