Circus for survivors: Cancer patients’ perception of participation in a circus workshop

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Background

- Phenomenological exploration investigates perceptions of 2 females with cancer diagnosis participating in 2’hour circus workshop.
- Potential role of circus as alternative therapy is explored
- Research in alternative therapies described that participants received hope & peace which can promote health & week-being (Wanchai et al., 2010).
- Circus provides opportunities: teamwork, collaboration, verbal & non-verbal communication, increased challenges, self-efficacy & a sense of belonging (Maglio & McKinstry 2008).
- 10 circus workshops led for cancer survivors provided opportunity to participate in juggling, aerials (trapeze & fabrics), hula hooping, & clowning.
- Two themes reoccurred:
  1. Circus created an escape from cancer
  2. Experiencing enjoyment despite current challenges.
- Interview with participants found circus provided a reprieve from disease, satisfaction with self & a quality of life experience.

PEO Model


Self-Determination Theory


Intervention

- Name Games
- Hops & Fears
- Partner Acrobatics
- Juggling
- Partner Juggling
- Tight Wire Walking
- Trapeze
- Aerial fabric
- Clowning
- Cool Down Stretches
- “See you down the road”
- (All above activities are OT groups, working on articulating emotions, balance, bi-manual coordination, gross & fine motor skills, social skills, graded goal attainment, positive risk taking.)

Flow

Flow - people are happiest in a state of concentrations or complete absorption with activity at hand (Csikszentmihályi 1997).

Illustrative Quotes

“...my trapeze training was the best therapy I could have had after my surgery and during radiation treatments. Because when you are a cancer patient, you go through all these treatments, you get all these booklets and advice from nurses on how to do exercises afterwards. It’s really boring and tedious and they feel like cancer patient exercises...like it’s prolonging the caner patient experience.”

“Tt felt good to spend a couple of hours not dedicated to thinking about cancer...I felt freeing. Even juggling which I’m really bad at was fun.”

“Reenergizing towards getting my stuff together to get through a pretty intense treatment plan...”

“Becoming more physically strong gave me more mental and emotional strength...it brought joy into my life.”

“It’s a balance between pushing yourself just a little bit beyond your comfort zone but still in a safe way.”

Conclusion

This thematic analysis yielded two reoccurring themes: Circus created a temporary reprieve from cancer and experiencing joy despite present challenges. One participant had a long time involvement with circus before her cancer diagnosis and was able to articulate the benefits of circus and it’s reprieves from her cancer realities. The other participant had just learned of her cancer diagnosis, was new to circus and had not yet received any treatment. Even though there were disparities between interview participants, honest responses were drawn out about their cancer and circus experiences.

Limitations

- Small sample size
- Interviewer bias
- Researcher was also the workshop facilitator
- Further research around circus & its role as an alternative therapy is needed
- Convenient sample

References