

Multifamily Groups in Severe Mental Health: Towards integration of patient and family needs

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Objectives

Practice standards and treatment recommendations, specify that families of patients with a severe mental health diagnosis should be given education and support. One of the *Schizophrenia Patient Outcomes Research Team (PORT)* treatment recommendations states that "Patients who have on-going contact with their families should be offered a family psychosocial intervention which spans at least nine months and which provides combinations of: Education about the illness; Family support; Crisis intervention and Problem solving skills training. (Dixon L. 1999)

During the last 4 years, a Multifamily Group workshop addressed to patients and their families from the Psychiatric Day Hospital (Parc de Salut Mar Barcelona) has been established as part of the therapeutic plan. These workshops focus on sharing experiences, in order to increase knowledge on mental health, promote an active role in recovery and offer family support.

Methods

Weekly sessions were carried out following the life-long learning methodology (Seoane et al. 2007). A multidisciplinary team was responsible of conducting the sessions (Psychiatrists, psychologist and a specialized mental health nurse). These workshops were offered to patients attending the Psychiatric day Hospital and their relatives. As part of the life-long learning methodology, one of the aims was to promote a shared experience and the identification of the patients and their relative's needs.

We have conducted a qualitative analysis of the main exposed topics and the needs that users and their relatives claim and towards the public mental health system.

Results

During 4 years, 80 patients and 96 relatives have participated in these multifamily groups. Positive reports have been obtained, considering this space as supportive, useful to exchange experiences, promote knowledge on mental health, develop problem solving strategies and establishing a social network between patients. This qualitative analysis shows the main topics and needs that have repeatedly been exposed across 4 years ([table 1](#)).

Table 1: Qualitative analysis of the main topics and needs collected during 4 years of Multifamily group Workshops

TOPICS	NEEDS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Stigma● Schizophrenia, Affective disorders and Anxiety disorders● Suicide and self-harm● Alcohol and substance use● Assertiveness● Family factors and vulnerability in mental health● Traumatic experiences● Chronicity● Social network● Medication adherence● Pharmacological treatment vs. other treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● More specific psychotherapeutic interventions for both patients and families addressing:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Communication skills○ Impulse Control○ Users and relatives assertive abilities○ Emotional control strategies○ Strategies to cope with symptomatology and crisis situations○ Relatives strategies to help users cope with mental illness● More information about mental health and services

Conclusions

Although family interventions are recommended as part of effective interventions (Sprenkle, D. 2012), data from client interviews suggest that family services are minimal, previous research has exposed that families have high levels of dissatisfaction with mental health services. The conducted multifamily group workshops did achieve the main objectives, which were to promote a space of shared experience between patients, families and professionals as well as to enhance a more active implication in the recovery process. It is also noteworthy, that the obtained qualitative information is crucial to step back and rethink how these demands can be integrated in our mental health system. This will allow a more inclusive approach and to further investigate how the perceived quality of mental health services by patients relate to the recovery processes and to the clinical and functional outcome.

References

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