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TEACHING COPING BEHAVIOUR
TO PSYCHIATRIC PATIENTS

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requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

A structured programme has been developed to teach aspects of the concept of "coping" to psychiatric patients. The teaching programme is based on the concepts of coping and adjustment developed by Lehner and Kube (1964); Coleman (1969); Lazarus (1969); Sawrey and Telford (1974); and Coelho, Hamburg and Adams (1974).

In order to test the hypothesis that patients' perceptions of nurses will affect their learning, the Massey - Patient -Nurse Projective Test (MPN) has been developed as a diagnostic tool. This is used to select patients for the two groups used in the teaching programme which is carried out by a registered general nurse who does not have a psychiatric qualification. The patients' coping behaviour is measured before and after the teaching programme by a coping behaviour test devised by the researcher for this study.

The development of both groups has been analysed in the light of Whitaker and Lieberman's theory of group development. A content analysis has been used to define categories of patient and nurse behaviour during the teaching programme. In addition the behaviour of each patient has been studied using an idiographic case study approach.

The teaching programme was first tested with eight psychiatric patients at a large psychiatric hospital. The same programme was then given to ten middle-aged psychiatric patients (two men and eight women) at the same hospital. The patients were selected into two groups on the basis of their results on the MPN test.

Grouped results show that patients who initially saw the nurse as "helpful" (Group A) did not change their coping behaviour. This group viewed nurses as "less helpful" at the end of the programme. Also, the group shifted its dependency from the nurse to the group members and ended in an early formative phase.

On the other hand, the group of patients who viewed nurses as "not helpful" (Group B) did show changes in their coping behaviour at the end of the programme. The group shifted their conflict with the nurse onto one of the group members and ended in a middle formative phase.

The content analysis shows that patients in Group B had a higher degree of resistance to learning than patients in Group A and fewer attempts to gain insight. The nurse also showed more stimulation of Group A than Group B to gain insight.

The case studies of the patients show a positive change in one Group A patient who developed self-confidence during the sessions, and improvements in two Group B patients who gained confidence in interacting with others, and in planning for future actions.

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INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, the author has worked with psychiatric patients in Thailand and New Zealand, and the similarity of the patients' problems in both countries has aroused the author's interest.

Firstly, most of the patients that the author came into contact with had experienced a number of stressful life events prior to their admission. This was also noted by Brown and Birley (1968); Paykel et al.(1969); Myers et al.(1971)(1972); and Paykel (1974).

Secondly, some of the patients tended to use particular methods in dealing with their problems. A study was conducted by the author into the history of ten psychiatric patients admitted consecutively to the Manawaroa Psychological Unit in Palmerston North between June and July 1976. One of the findings was that all seven re-admitted patients tended to cope with their problems by using the same method that they had used during their previous breakdowns. For example, several of them had a history of withdrawing from their problems, becoming depressed and attempting suicide. This is also noted by Donovan (1975) in his study of psychiatric patients' background histories.

Thirdly, most of the re-admitted patients with whom the author has worked, at Lake Alice Hospital, Manawaroa, and in Thailand, often claimed that they could not cope with their situation at home when they returned, and they believed that this was the cause of their re-admittance.

These findings, even though they were the subjective impressions of a small number of cases, suggested that some psychiatric patients have problems in the area of coping behaviour. That is, that psychiatric patients have a need to develop new and more appropriate ways of coping with their problems (Armstrong, 1975).

It is believed that effective behaviour can be learned (Rose, 1977) and accordingly, psycho-therapy is essentially a re-education or re-learning process concerned with the altering of maladjustive behaviour (Ullman and Krasner, 1965). Moreover, in the course of psychotherapy, patients are often stimulated to learn more adequate

and effective means of dealing with their problems (Coleman, 1956).

Nurses are the professional health personnel most likely to spend the greatest amount of time with the psychiatric patients (Mereness and Taylor, 1978). Morrice (1975) reports that nurses are held in high esteem by psychiatric patients, and are thus in a position to exert great therapeutic influence. Nurses are therefore, in an ideal position to help psychiatric patients learn new and more appropriate methods of coping. This view is supported by Rankin (1975) who notes that nursing actions strive to maximize existing coping behaviour and explore alternatives for the patients to use in coping with their stress. To do this, the author of the present thesis believes that a structured teaching programme is of importance and such a programme has been developed in the present study.

Besides a well structured teaching programme, the patients' initial perceptions of nurses as helpful is thought to be related to the effectiveness of the patients' learning. This relationship was previously described as a placebo-effect. That is, if patients believe that nurses can help them solve their problems, they will benefit from a teaching programme introduced by a nurse (Fish, 1973).

Statement of Problem

It is evident that a number of psychiatric patients are people who have failed to cope effectively with their stressful life events (Caplan, 1963; Adamson and Schmale, 1965; Donovan, 1975). Thus, there is a need for psychiatric nurses to focus their actions on helping these patients to learn new and appropriate coping behaviours (Rankin, 1975; Pesnecker and McNeil, 1975; Armstrong, 1975).

There are many factors involved in effective learning by patients, such as their intelligence, willingness to participate, symptoms and the perceptions of the nurses who care for them. In the present study the author was interested specifically in the effects that the patients perceptions of nurses have on their learning. That is, in the kind of perceptions that would enable patients to benefit from a teaching programme. If this was known, the nurse-teacher could then assess these perceptions and plan an appropriate teaching programme for these patients.