Background and Introduction to the Project

The meaning of spirituality can vary from person to person, therefore the complexities surrounding the spiritual needs of those with life limiting illness has afforded much attention from government and professional institutions (Milligan, 2011). As far back as 1951, Saunders and Sykes defined ‘the spirit’ as the vital principle within a person, including ‘thought’ at the deepest level. It therefore follows that spiritual care is at the heart of all that we do and is not an added extra (Wright and Neuberger, 2013).

Against this backdrop, an Expressive Support Group pilot project was proposed and facilitated by a Palliative Care Community Nurse Specialist who extended her role.

The project was planned to focus on the patient as a person and to adopt a person-centred art therapy approach to help address spiritual needs within the context of overall holistic care.

Personalised Art Therapy shares the conditions appropriate to Person-centred Counselling. In addition, it uses the right side of the brain to access creativity (Silventone, 1997; Rodgers, 1985).

The use of colour and imagery promotes spontaneity and can gain access to the sub-conscious, the here and now, imagination, intuition and inspiration.

Much of this reflects the spiritual or interpersonall being of the person and therefore demands the utmost respect and sensitivity on behalf of the facilitator who does not force, intrude or interpret.

Addressing the spiritual care needs of people near the end of life is an essential part of holistic care where health is concerned but I will keep control of the things I can control’.

Provided a useful outlet for my personal energies.

 phenomenological approach helped the participants to relax, make sense of their art work, become self-aware and take ownership of relevant issues. This provided the facilitator with valuable insight and an opportunity to introduce information booklets or refer to other members of the Multidisciplinary Team.

During the conclusion period the facilitator reflected the progress with the participants to ‘Tall Poppies’. Not the entire group felt like ‘a tall poppy’ during this process. Jumping through the ring of fire has been used to symbolise the whole of life. It can get easier and less fearful... Eventually the show will stop – you or the audience will win – depending on how you choose to live your life.

Process

‘The Circus’ generated much fun, laughter and during the group process the exercise demonstrated that the group affirmed that the individual’s character can predetermine. Each participant shared their perceived position within the group, circle of friends, family, throughout illness and in their general. Discussion highlighted a plethora of contrasting thoughts, feelings, memories, surprises and self discovery.

The images and corresponding quotations demonstrate the power of creativity where bridges can be built from the subconscious (internal) to the external world.

Outcome of the Pilot Project

Evaluation included a ten point questionnaire consisting of open and closed questions, individual and group feedback.

- Everyone found the use of colour and imagery a useful aid to self expression.
- The following quotes provide examples:
  - Highlighted negative emotions and fears: 
    - ‘Guided fantasy helped me release, feel free’
    - ‘I learned it was OK to open up and express my feelings’
  - ‘I have used my therapy to move on – change perspectives and achieved a good deal’.
- They felt safe and experienced a sense of achievement, love, laughter and honesty.
- Four people felt their confidence had improved as a result of the experience.
- Four people felt their confidence had improved as a result of the experience.
- For the professional, working in a dual role, the experience highlighted the importance of maintaining boundaries and ensured the validity of supervision.
- All agreed that ten weeks would be more advantageous to help develop their friendships and the overall therapeutic experience.

Sharing emotional and spiritual issues created a depth to their relationships and may feel a sense of loss at the end of the project. This was compounded through the sudden death of one of the group members.

Conclusions

The project demonstrated the powerful effect of creativity within a safe and supportive setting. The mystical way it highlights the multifaceted emotional and spiritual layers that capture the essence of the person. The person centred, non-analytical approach helped the participants to relax, make sense of their art work, become self aware and take ownership of relevant issues. This provided the facilitator with valuable insight and an opportunity to introduce information booklets or refer to other members of the Multidisciplinary Team during the conclusion period the facilitator reflected the progress with the participants to ‘Tall Poppies’. Not the entire group felt like ‘a tall poppy’ during this process. Jumping through the ring of fire has been used to symbolise the whole of life. It can get easier and less fearful... Eventually the show will stop – you or the audience will win – depending on how you choose to live your life.

The encouraging results from the Pilot Project have provided the opportunity for Further Expressive Support work within the hospice.

References

Milligan, S (2011) Addressing the spiritual care needs of people near the end of life (Nursing Standard vol 26, no 4) p47-56


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