Letter of Intent
The Creation of a Manual for Art Therapists Working with Siblings of People with Schizophrenia

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**Problem Statement**

Siblings of adults with schizophrenia are not receiving the support they need. In a study by Anderson and Kinsella (1996) participants voiced concern over the lack of individual treatment and resources they were receiving as a sibling of an adult with a mental illness. Lohrer, Lukens and Thorning (2002) had similar findings; siblings voiced that there are gaps in service with regards to their personal well-being. Currently, very few support groups are designed specifically for siblings. Anderson and Kinsella (1996) discuss the importance of extending current support practices to include siblings. The intent of this project is to review the literature on support for siblings of people with schizophrenia and to explore the benefits of art therapy as a possible treatment modality. An examination of the literature in both the areas of schizophrenia and art therapy will be used for the creation of a manual for art therapists to use with clients that have been affected by having a sibling with schizophrenia.

**Project Rationale**

In order to move forward in the area of developing support for siblings of adults with schizophrenia there is a necessity to explore existing research in order to understand what has been done in the past and to examine where the gaps in support still remain (Greenberg, Mailick, & Seltzer, 1997; Lukens, Thorning, & Lohrer, 2002). The project will be broken down into three areas: The first two sections will be derived from the literature and the third will be the creation of the manual. The sections are: (1) the effects and experiences of individuals living with an adult sibling with schizophrenia, (2) the history of art therapy, the uses of art therapy, and the possible benefits of art therapy, (3) a discussion covering what is available in the literature concerning the joining of these two areas and what can be hypothesized from examining the two separately. This
final step will feed into the creation of a theoretical manual for art therapists to use with siblings of adults with schizophrenia.

There is little doubt that all family members are affected when a member of the family is living with schizophrenia (Teschinsky, 2000). Kristofferson, Kjell, and Mustard (2000) state: “Families of patients experience a significant burden in having a family member with a mental illness. The impact or burden may be defined in relation to the presence of problems, difficulties and unfortunate relationships which impact the lives of the patient’s relatives (p. 1). Similarly, Anderson and Kinsella (1996) indicate that mental illness affects all members of the family: “Mental illness by its very nature, a familial experience” (p. 1). Just as every person in a family is unique so too is their reactions and emotions to the arrival and effects of this illness. The available support for each family member also varies from one relation to the other. An examination of the literature and a look at community support systems indicate that most of the support available is specifically for parents (Anderson & Kinsella, 1996; Lohrer, Lukens, & Thorning, 2002).

Supporting Literature: Schizophrenia and Siblings

Lukens, Thorning, and Lohrer (2002) examined the effects of having a sibling with a severe and persistent mental illness (SPMI). The study concentrated on gaps in services and communication with the mental health community. Gaps in services are another frustration experienced by the ‘well’ siblings; services are not made available specifically for siblings. In the study by Lukens, Thorning and Lohrer (2002) “the siblings described their evolving anger and aggressiveness as they became increasingly disillusioned with the mental health system” (p.9). Interestingly, respondents differentiated between general support groups and those designed specifically for siblings:
The other group I was in was mostly parents, and so maybe there was an age thing, because parental guilt and the whole thing is so much different from the sibling thing, there’s this obsession with the ill person. The group I am in now is more about the sibling, what’s going on with you, what’s happening in your life, “yes, you can tell me for days how your sister is doing, but how are you?” (Lukens, Thoring & Lohrer, 2002, p. 6)

Studies such as this shed light on the importance of support specifically set up for siblings. In the study by Riebschleger (1991) participants recommended that support groups be developed for siblings to deal with their grief and loss and to help them find people like themselves to relate with and exchange ideas and information with. Another area of concern is that siblings are frequently left in the role of caregiver, resulting in feelings of confusion, ambivalence, attachment, and a sense of burden (Jones, 1997; Lukens, Thoring & Lohrer, 2002; Stein & Wemmerus, 2001; Teschinsky, 2000). Few studies have been carried out that examine the implications of becoming a caregiver if ‘well’ siblings are not properly taken care of themselves or have no resources (Stein & Wemmerus, 2001). An opportunity exists for siblings of adults with schizophrenia to explore their roles of brother/sister and caregiver and to deal with the feelings they may be experiencing relating to the loss of the person they once knew. The areas mentioned above are only some of the challenges facing well siblings. This project will examine the literature to gain a broader perspective of the more common issues facing the siblings - targeting these issues aids in the creation of a more precise treatment plan. Anderson and Kinsella (1996) point to the need for alternative coping methods for the well siblings. Outlets and activities included “play, art, reading, music, and school – related or organized social activities” (p. 3). Such remarks or findings encourage further exploration of the idea of using art therapy as a
therapeutic means of dealing with the issues that arise for siblings – issues such as coping mechanisms.

Supporting Literature: Art Therapy

Due to the lack of literature pertaining specifically to ‘well’ siblings and art therapy other studies will be examined that relate to emotions associated with grief, loss, the role of becoming a caregiver and how art therapy has been used with such issues. An example of one study that related specifically to well-siblings and art therapy indicated that while on the outside the ego of the ‘well’ siblings may appear intact and balanced; art therapy sessions have indicated differently. For example, in Kwiatkowski’s (2001) study on family art therapy she noted:

The art productions of ‘well’ siblings revealed the following characteristics:

Representational pictures are usually fairly well-organized, unified, and show no gross distortions; but if there are no limits set by objective reality, if the picture is to be developed from a scribble, or is intended to express a mood or a feeling, the change is impressive. Only then one realizes how frail the ego of these siblings is. (p. 31)

Kwiatkowska’s study is another indication that siblings of adults with schizophrenia are not being properly taken care of; if they are the future caregivers of the mentally ill more energy needs to be invested into finding out what they need for resources and for coping mechanisms. Studies have shown that art therapy can help many grieving individuals respond more quickly than other forms of traditional therapy (Irwin, 1991; Junge, 1985; McIntyre, 1990; & Simon, 1981 as cited in Hill, 2001). Hill (2002) discusses the benefits of using group art therapy with grieving clients because the “format provides more reflective surfaces to both contain and mirror each individual’s experience of loss and validate his/her sense of self” (Birnbaum, 1991; Lane & Graham-Poole, 1994; Sontag & Henry; 1994; Speert, 1993; Zamierowski & Golden, 1992, as
cited in Hill, 2001). Research has been lacking in the area of facilitated programs for siblings; an area that is crucial if the mental health of siblings is to be monitored for their future well-being and for the future of their brothers and sisters (Lukens, Thorning, & Lohrer, 2002). At this time an opportunity exists to take the existing literature and use the results to create a support intervention for the ‘well’ siblings.

Methods and Procedures

The literature review will begin with a focus on the research that has been conducted with regards to people that have an adult sibling with schizophrenia and then proceed to examine the uses of art therapy. Studies such as those by Lukens, Thorning, and Lohrer (2002); Kwiatkowski (2001); and Anderson and Kinsella (1996) will be used as preliminary resources and provide key terms for researching literature in different data bases (Mertens, 1998). As suggested by Mertens (1998), narrative synthesis will be used to gather the information, analyze, and synthesize the results. Only once the literature review has been completed and the findings have been compiled will the formulation of a manual begin. An open view will be harbouried in the progression of the investigation, allowing room for new theories to emerge. Matt and Cook (1994) suggest “the reader be cognizant of the quality of the studies included” (p. 53). They also state that to “really have a basis for critically analyzing research, it is helpful to have a broad experience with different types of research as well as with a number of studies that represent the same research topic” (p. 55). Although complete neutrality is impossible, every effort will be made to monitor possible biased selections and readings of the literature.
Implications

The hope is that this project will shed light on the needs of siblings of people with schizophrenia. Specifically, that few resources are made available to ‘well’ siblings or take into account the unique needs of siblings. Understanding the needs of this population makes it easier to formulate a unique treatment/resource plan. The success of such a project could lead to future projects in the area of viable support for this population and further research in the area of art therapy as a valid form of treatment.
References


skills of hospice professionals dealing with the bereaved. The *American Journal of Hospice and Palliative Care*, 1, 5 – 10.