



DANCE/MOVEMENT THERAPY AND REMINISCENCE: A NEW APPROACH TO SENILE DEMENTIA IN JAPAN

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In Japan, as in many parts of the developed world, society is rapidly aging and, as a result, the frequency of senile dementia and Alzheimer's disease is also increasing at an alarming rate. Because this disease is most often chronic, progressive and incurable, it is difficult to determine an adequate scope for therapeutic intervention. Human aging is a complex process; therefore, it is important to take a broad view of systematic treatment for its concomitant diseases. In recent years, numerous research studies have reported on non-medicinal approaches to problems associated with aging. As a result, the medical profession has become more aware of the importance of using both medicinal and non-medicinal treatments in order to alleviate the physical, psychological and social suffering of senile dementia patients and to help them in maintaining a healthy lifestyle in institutional settings.

Until recently, the most common approach to treating patients suffering from senile dementia in Japan has been predominantly medicinal in nature. Although the use of drug therapies has done much to benefit these patients, new approaches to the problem in Japan are now focusing on what is known as the "quality of life" of patients, and various rehabilitation therapies are presently being initiated in many institutions throughout the country. One of these new, non-medicinal approaches, dance/movement therapy (DMT), appears to offer some promise in contributing to the quality of life and welfare of senile dementia patients.

Successful aging has long been associated with a process known as the Life Review. Many research studies have shown that reminiscing by the elderly is a normal adaptation response to the aging process and should be encouraged. Reminiscence or life review activities have also been successfully used in psychotherapy, usually based on traditional verbal modalities. Because verbal communication is often difficult for senile dementia patients, body-oriented approaches to reminiscing, such those used in dance/movement therapy, have great potential as therapeutic techniques. This paper will explore this potential in more detail by examining the role of DMT in stimulating reminiscence and the life review in senile dementia patients.

Reminiscing, Dance/Movement Therapy and Senile Dementia

The period of old age is a stage of integrating one's spiritual world and readjusting one's past experiences to the present, and reminiscing among the elderly plays an important role in this process. A significant number of research studies (e.g., Butler, 1963, 1974; Lewis, 1971; McMahan & Rhudick, 1967) have reported that reminiscing about one's past life is a universal adaptation response to aging.

Butler (1963) suggested that reminiscing should be interpreted as a universal occurrence in older people that stimulates personal growth and should not be

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viewed in a negative light as sometimes still occurs. Furthermore, he noted that the process of the life review is evoked by "the realization of approaching dissolution and death," and that it is "characterized by a progressive return to consciousness of past experience, in particular the resurgence of unresolved conflicts which can now be surveyed and integrated" (Butler 1974, p. 534).

McMahon and Rhudick confirmed that reminiscing is an adaptation response. They stated that reminiscing "is not directly related to either intelligence or intellectual deterioration" (1967, p. 69). Their study also reported that clinically depressed patients have great difficulty in reminiscing, much more so than non-depressed subjects. Moreover, they indicated that "reminiscing is positively related to freedom from depression and to personal survival" (1967, p. 78).

Even normal elderly people change due to loss of relationships and declining physical abilities, causing withdrawal from their usual life activities. Leventhal and Schwartz (1989, p. 69) pointed out that "as the life-space-experiential world shrinks due to loss of friends and family [so the elderly seem] to exhibit a strong need for more dependent symbiotic union with [their] environment."

With these clients, dance/movement therapy can be a useful therapeutic tool. As a proper amount of exercise vitalizes and awakens the brain functions, DMT is able to benefit senior citizens in encouraging them to extend and explore their physical, emotional, cognitive and social worlds in a non-threatening, comfortable and friendly atmosphere. As Garnet (1974, p. 61) noted, DMT is based on a somatic rather than verbal approach to therapy and stresses the importance of both the psychological and physical functioning of participants. Dance/movement therapy with the elderly has the following goals: (1) to revitalize bodily movement, (2) to release psycho-physical tensions and sense of isolation, (3) to stimulate constructive recall, reality contact and social interaction, and (4) to provide opportunities for expressing feelings (see Helm, 1985; Samberg, 1988; and Sandel, 1978).

For an increasing number of elderly people who find their health deteriorating, DMT can be of great benefit, as in the case of senile dementia. It is commonly agreed that the major symptoms of senile dementia are loss of short- and long-term memories, confusion and disorientation and depression. Senile dementia patients usually suffer from a combination of physical and mental problems, which sometimes increases their disorientation. The aim of DMT with

these patients, as with normal elderly clients, is to stimulate them on physical, emotional, cognitive and social levels.

As noted above, reminiscing plays an important role in the natural process of aging and, as such, is also used as one of a wide range of psychotherapeutic techniques with patients suffering from senile dementia. In promoting reminiscing among senile dementia patients, DMT has been found to be particularly effective. Because verbal communication is often difficult for these patients, DMT techniques, which function directly through the body, help to stimulate their sense of self-expression.

As Martin and Stepath (1993) reported, these types of nonverbal techniques are more effective than traditional verbal modalities in reminiscence group sessions with elderly patients suffering from mental disorders such as depression, dementia, paranoia, and other similar disorders. "The major dimensions on which the effects occurred involved interaction, orientation, and physical activity, suggesting that [these techniques] not only facilitated interaction among group members but also stimulated attention" (1993, p. 145).

Sandel, in developing supportive approaches to geriatric psychotherapy, confirmed that dance/movement therapy is effective in stimulating reminiscing:

Reminiscing, as it occurs within movement therapy sessions with the aged, appears to stimulate short-term cognitive reorganization among disoriented patients and socialization among patients with a wide range of physical and mental disabilities. Movement therapy is especially conducive to reminiscing which emerges spontaneously as a result of the sensory experiences; even the most disorganized patients may share in another's memory, if only on a physical level. (1978, p. 221)

The Body Exists as a Container of Human History

The human body conveys the truth that people carry their past experiences, relationships, and learning with them throughout the whole of life. These experiences are retained as memories that are engraved in our bodies. According to Schilder (1935/78), the image of body is formed in the mind, established from sensory impressions and constituted from past experiences. Many dance/movement therapists

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