

The Effect of Therapeutic Touch on Behavioral Symptoms of Persons with Dementia

Submitted by The Healing Trust on 03 Jun 2011 - 03:28

Woods DL, Craven RF, Whitney J.

College of Nursing, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, USA.

Abstract

Background

Approximately 80% of nursing home residents who suffer from Alzheimer's disease and related dementia develop behavioral symptoms of dementia. Given the deleterious side effects of pharmacologic therapy in this population there is an urgent need for clinical trials of nonpharmacologic interventions.

Objective

To examine the effect of therapeutic touch on the frequency and intensity of behavioral symptoms of dementia.

Method

A randomized, double-blind, three-group experimental study: experimental (therapeutic touch), placebo (placebo therapeutic touch), and control (usual care). Fifty-seven residents, aged 67 to 93 years, exhibiting behavioral symptoms of dementia, were randomized to one of the three groups within each of three Special Care Units within three Long-Term Care facilities in a western Canadian province. Behavioral observation was completed every 20 minutes from 8:00AM to 6:00PM for three days pre-intervention and for three days post-intervention by trained observers who were blind to group assignment. The intervention consisted of therapeutic touch given twice daily for 5-7 minutes for three days between 10:00AM and 11:30PM and between 3:00PM and 4:30PM (N = 57). The main outcome variable was overall behavioral symptoms of dementia, consisting of six categories of behaviors: manual manipulation (restlessness), escape restraints, searching and wandering, tapping and banging, pacing and walking, and vocalization.

Results

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) ($F = 3.331$, $P = .033$) and the Kruskal-Wallis test ($\chi^2 = 6.661$, $P = .036$) indicated a significant difference in overall behavioral symptoms of dementia, manual manipulation and vocalization when the experimental group was compared to the placebo and control groups. The experimental (significant) was more effective in decreasing behavioral symptoms of dementia than usual care, while the placebo group indicated a decreasing trend in behavioral symptoms of dementia compared to usual care.

Conclusions

Therapeutic touch offers a nonpharmacological, clinically relevant modality that could be used to decrease behavioral symptoms of dementia, specifically manual manipulation (restlessness) and vocalization, two prevalent behaviors.