

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Groups for Stroke Patients

Developing a rolling programme of different therapy groups has proved highly successful. The ACT group has been particularly well received. Up to 10 patients can attend and the group runs for 6 weeks. It involves a mixture of didactic presentation, exercises, videos, individual and paired work and group reflection. Attendance has been consistently high. It incorporates Mindfulness exercises which are given as intensive daily homework. The content helps patients to develop self-efficacy and respond to their current circumstances in new ways. Exercises such as “Walking in the Rain” and “The Bus” encourage patients to visualise their difficulties in different ways, challenging fixed and unhelpful thoughts or patterns of behaviour while enabling new and creative solutions to develop. Reflecting on suffering is never easy, however the ACT group discusses the topic in a sensitive and supportive way. The material helps patients to understand the role they play in continuing (and even increasing) their suffering. The group discusses ways of changing how they relate to suffering and engenders skills to manage more effectively. The emphasis on values is particularly important and helps patients to reengage with meaningful activities and feelings of self-worth and purpose. It encourages re-engagement with the world outside of stroke rehabilitation particularly in terms of strengthening relationships and pursuing new life goals. In the last session patients briefly note down the positive attributes of the other group members. This task helps to reaffirm individual strengths while facilitating self-acceptance and confidence.

End of group assessment indicates clinically significant improvements in mood have occurred. Three month follow up shows that attendees continue to explore and developed new interests as well as widen their social network. Self-esteem and general well-being are rated as high.

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