The Tourette OCD Alberta Network: Development of an Educational Outreach Program for Schools

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Background

- Educational outreach is an in-school intervention, enabling students and educators to learn about TS, OCD and co-morbidities.
- The knowledge imparted in an in-service presentation helps address the educational barriers students with TS and OCD face, and it has the potential to improve the student’s focus and motivation in the classroom.
- Providing psychoeducation about tic disorders increases knowledge and changes attitudes and behaviours towards individual with TS.
- It is important to study how in-service presentations functionally impact students at school.

Results

1 Communicating with schools

- Convincing school boards, school principals and classroom teachers of the importance of the educational outreach program to teaching and learning was challenging.
- Parental assistance, advocacy and persistence in maintaining line of communication with school were essential.
- Imperative to make contact with gatekeepers: president of Alberta Teacher’s Association, school counsellors.

2 Post-presentation parent interviews

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Methods

- Presentations were devised on the basis of need:
  1. Garnered from parent conversations at the Tourette syndrome clinic at the Alberta Children’s Hospital.
  2. Requested by parents or schools via our website.

All presentations were related to TS.

- Between December 2020 and December 2022, 16 in-service presentations were delivered: 15 online and one in person.
- Parents participated in a post-presentation interview

Structure of Presentation

| 1 | Tic phenomenology/psychoeducation |
| 2 | OCD phenomenology/psychoeducation |
| 3 | Interactive empathy activity |
| 4 | Classroom Strategies – teachers only |

Types of audience

- Students: 288
- Teachers: 62
- Teaching assistants: 2
- Counsellors: 3

Total number of participants: 375

Presentations: types of schools

- Elementary – Grades 3 to 6
- Junior High – Grade 9
- Senior High – Grade 9-12

Conclusions

- The educational outreach program underlined the positive impact knowledge of tics has in improving the child’s well being in the classroom and therefore their learning chances.
- Gaining access to school is challenging and best facilitated by building on parents‘ existing relationships with school personnel.
- The dynamic of the classroom changes after a presentation due to better informed teachers, more tolerant classmates, and a child with who is increasingly uninhibited about discussing their tics at home and at school.

References

1 Nussey et al., 2013