Evaluation of a Psychoeducation Group for Children presenting with Functional Tics

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Background: The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase in rapid-onset functional tic-like behaviours (FTLBs) in children and adolescents, which are thought to be related to underlying depression, stress, and anxiety (1, 2). The current evidence base for interventions to treat FTLBs is limited. Clinical interventions are pragmatic with a focus on targeted psychoeducation. Goal-based outcomes (GBOs) have been used in children with functional movement disorder including tics and allows them to set their own targets and to measure change post-intervention (3). We implemented a pilot psychoeducation group, collected service-user feedback, and used GBOs to monitor effectiveness. The aim was to evaluate a two-and a half-hour psychoeducational group intervention on functional tics, measuring change in patient centred goals.

Methods: Following a multidisciplinary assessment and diagnosis of functional tics within a specialist hospital, young people and their families were invited to a remote psychoeducation group. 37 young people attended one of four remote psychoeducation groups between 7th May 2021 and 15th February 2022. To date we have received 19 GBOs and 9 service-user evaluation forms. Achievement of each goal was rated on a scale of 0 (not at all) to 10 (fully met) before and immediately after the group. The service-user evaluation form developed by the team gathered qualitative and quantitative data about service users' experiences of the group and was distributed to parents and young people. Parents and young people were asked their thoughts using statements on the helpfulness of the group, how much they learnt, their understanding of functional tics, whether questions were sufficiently answered, and if they would recommend the group to others. Parents were asked to rate an additional statement; 'I feel confident in supporting my child with their functional tics'. The method of data collection included telephone follow-up and the hospital's patient record messaging system.

Results and Preliminary Conclusions: Typical goals were 'to learn more about functional tics,' 'to meet other young people with functional tics,' and 'to learn coping strategies.' Young people and their parents reported significant improvement in their goals following the group ($t(18) = -5.85$, $p = < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.88$, a large effect size). Goal achievement ranged from a 1 to 7-point increase following the group. Of this group, 85.7% of parents and

psychoeducation sessions successfully support young people with functional tics and appear to be an acceptable first step in managing their care.

References:

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