An Integrated Rehabilitation Experience: The family as a team member

Dr Joanne Sherry (Clinical Neuropsychologist) and Jonathan Armstrong (Occupational Therapist)

ABI Rehabilitation New Zealand Ltd

Introduction
The literature suggests that involving the client’s family in rehabilitation following a brain injury results in better outcomes for the client. The family provides valuable feedback to the client and therapy team. They can act to reinforce positive behaviours and provide sustainability in continued coping.

Family involvement is a key element for success in post-acute brain injury rehabilitation programs (Evans et al, 2008)
Professionals should see themselves as teachers and help families learn about brain injury and recovery (Kreutzer et al, 2010)
Therapists should address family perceptions in order to facilitate positive client attitudes and active client participation with therapy activities (Sherer et al, 2007)

The literature is sparse around how this involvement is best achieved in clinical settings. The current study aimed to describe how the interdisciplinary team at ABI Rehabilitation works to actively involve family in rehabilitation.

Figure of therapeutic alliance

Methods
A case report is presented to illustrate the above. “Paul” is a 20 year old Samoan male who sustained a severe brain injury in a motor vehicle accident. His primary support person is his mother, “Julie”. At the admission handover it was reported that there was significant conflict at the acute hospital around consenting to treatment, complying with cares and negotiating with the interdisciplinary team. The team identified that building a therapeutic alliance with both Paul and Julie would be a key factor in Paul’s rehabilitation.

A practical approach to family intervention:

Conclusions
The outcome of this approach has been a smoother rehabilitation process for Paul with limited conflict. A positive therapeutic alliance has also been built and maintained with Julie, despite occasional setbacks.

This type of approach comes with unique challenges. However, we believe that it could be successfully applied to all families coming into our service. It is possible that not all the elements represented above are necessary for families to engage with the rehabilitation team. Future research is required to establish which interventions are the most effective and to formalize the approach into a model that can be shared across services.

References and Acknowledgements

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