Interdisciplinary Mental Health Approach to Equine Assisted Therapy For Veterans
Elizabeth Large MOT, Brier Van Valin MOT & Sonia Zimmerman, Ph.D., OTR/L, FAOTA

Why this topic?

Brier
Interested in the veteran population, specifically with PTSD

Beth
knowledge of EAT
bringing OT to a unique and beneficial environment
bringing research expertise of OT field to help EAT industry

Objectives
Attendees will verbally define occupational therapy.
Attendees will gain an understanding of research leading to the formation of the program plan.
Attendees will gain information regarding the interdiciplinary program plan called VETS.
Attendees will gain knowledge in how VETS can serve veterans in a deeper way, add to quality programming at PATH Intl centers, and increase research supporting use of equines with this population.

Occupational Therapy
“Therapeutic use of everyday life activities(occupations) with individuals or groups for the purpose of enhancing or enabling participation in roles, habits, and routines in home, school, workplace, community, and other settings.”

Introduction

• Purpose:
  • Develop a program with a manual that provides an interdiciplinary, theory-driven structure to increase veterans’ occupational performance in the community using equines as a therapeutic medium.
  • The program is called Veterans Equine Therapy Services: An Interdisciplinary Approach (VETS)

• Problem:
  • Veterans are returning from deployment and encountering a diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder, which hinders their ability to reintegrate into non-military life

Review of Literature


• **Cultural Norms**: Signoracci, Bahraini, Matarazzo, Olson-Madden and Brenner (2014)

Veterans experience different cultural norms when switching from the military culture to the civilian culture.

**Why Equines**

Equines are used because of their natural instincts:

Cody et al, (2011)

Equines are used because they respond using their natural instincts, which leads the client to experience their own emotions through the reaction of the equine.

Equines mimic emotions:

MacLean, (2011)

Equines are prey animals, unlike dogs, who require humans to gain their trust. Veterans with PTSD are often hypervigilant, similar to equines, which leads to a mutual understanding.

If veterans with PTSD express strong emotions, equine characteristics of being large and sensitive allow them to automatically reflect the veteran’s emotions in a noticeable way. Equines require humans to work to gain their trust, leading to a stronger bond and breaking the isolation that veterans with PTSD often feel.

**Veteran Equine Therapy Services: An Interdisciplinary Approach (VETS)**

**Admission Criteria**

All veterans will be screened prior to being admitted into VETS to help ensure a higher chance of completion and positive outcomes of the program.

Total of 8 vets accepted for each 11 week session, allowing for 4 programs to be run each year.

Veterans must be discharged from a US military branch w/in the past 2 years,

Primary diagnosis of PTSD

Can effectively participate in the group setting

Have access to reliable transportation

Referral from a psychologist, psychiatrist, or primary care physician

Should be able and will attend all sessions, including orientation.

**VETS**

Model of Human Occupation (MOHO)

Gary Keilhofner (2008, p. 1)

Supports occupation centered intervention (the doing)

Helps in determining client needs

Provides holistic view of clients

Offers a client-centered paradigm

Allows for easy goal setting

Provides rationale for intervention

**The Model of Human Occupation (MOHO)**

• **Selecting MOHO**
MOHO was selected as the theoretical basis to guide the structure of VETS because the core concepts aligned with the purpose and goals of the product, promoted interprofessional collaboration, and is supported by evidence that confirms its validity and reliability. It also have a therapeutic reasoning guide.

- **Concepts Used to Guide Interventions**
  MOHO concepts were used to guide the creation of each week of intervention for VETS, first raising awareness of the concept through engaging with the equines, then by engaging veterans in occupations at the center, and finally discussing the application the concept to each veterans’ occupations outside of the center environment.

**The Concepts of MOHO Applied to VETS**

Week 1: Environment  
Week 2: Volition  
Week 3: Habituation  
Week 4: Performance Capacity  
Week 5: Occupational Participation  
Week 6: Occupational Performance  
Week 7: Performance Skills  
Week 8: Occupational Identity  
Week 9: Occupational Competence  
Week 10: Occupational Adaptation  
Week 11: Achievement

**Assessments**

- **The Clinician Administered PTSD Scale for DSM-5:** U.S Department of Veterans Affairs, (2015)
- **Program Evaluation**

**Cole’s 7 Steps**

- Introduction  
- Activity  
- Sharing  
- Processing  
- Generalizing  
- Application
Summary

Session Content

- Week 1: Environment
  - Group day 1: Veterans complete assessments and get acquainted to the social and physical environment.
  - Group day 2: Veterans become comfortable with equines and the environment.
  - Individual session: Review results of assessments and create and intervention plan

- Week 2: Volition
  - Group day 1: Veterans participate in determining motivation of equines to move without using equipment.
  - Group day 2: Personal goals are developed and a discussion on motivation to accomplish those goals is conducted.
  - Individual session: Past motivations of the veterans are discussed and applied to their goals of program

Therapeutic Riding Lesson

- Purpose
- Skills

Limitations and Recommendations

- Lack of quantitative research
- Transportation
- 11 week program
- Funding

Conclusion

- Purpose of VETS
- Best practice guide
- Provides structure and recommended outcomes measures
- The VETS manual is available for purchase for $26
  Please contact Brier or Beth at bsvanvalin@gmail.com or beth.large2016@gmail.com to order!

References


