



Designing a Caregiver Communication Tool in the Context of Episodic Care for the Outpatient Pediatric Setting

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OVERVIEW OF CAPSTONE SITE

Kids Therapy Spot is a pediatric outpatient therapy clinic that offers speech therapy, physical therapy, and occupational therapy to children ages birth through 16 with a variety of diagnoses. OT 4 Kidz is the occupational therapy division of Kids Therapy Spot. This clinic employs over 25 therapists across five total locations in 8 counties in east Mississippi. Due to the rural nature of this area and restricted access to services, this clinic has a high volume of referrals and an extensive wait list. In addition, the clinic reports a large number of clients who are considered “long term,” meaning they have received or have the potential to receive therapy services for greater than three years. As a result, OT 4 Kidz at Kids Therapy Spot has expressed interest in adopting an episodic model of care for their long term clients, and this desire has driven the goals of this capstone project.

LITERATURE SUMMARY

Although little evidence exists to support the episodic model of care, this program was structured based on an existing successful program that has implemented episodic care within a hospital system (McQuiddy et al., 2019). Ongoing personal communication with the author of this program helped to shape the development of this program. In addition, research was conducted to identify similar existing programs (McQuiddy et al., 2019; Kennedy Krieger Institute, 2017; Children’s of Alabama, 2021), identify parent communication and support techniques (Your Therapy Source, 2021; Virtual Lab School, 2021), and explore the perspectives of parents of children with chronic illness (Smith et al., 2015; Raising the Extraordinary, 2016).

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The needs assessment was conducted in two phases in order to gather information on the needs of the capstone site and formulate a project to fit those needs. The Phase I Assessment was a semi-structured interview consisting of open ended questions with the capstone mentor via a video conferencing platform. Various needs were identified through this process, including the rural setting, a high volume of long-term clients, and a lengthy waitlist for therapy services. In the Phase II needs assessment, five occupational therapists were interviewed face-to-face using open ended, semi-structured interview questions. These questions targeted the definition of “long term,” current caregiver communication trends, and the feasibility of episodic care in this setting.

PROJECT GOALS / OBJECTIVES

- Goal 1: The Student will develop a tool to be used to foster communication between parents and therapists at Kids Therapy Spot.
- Goal 2: The student will create and present a learning module for therapists on implementing the communication tool and using motivational interviewing strategies.
- Goal 3: The student will design a plan for future expansion and development of the program by the end of the capstone experience.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT and/or IMPLEMENTATION

Based on the findings of the needs assessment, stakeholders agreed that implementing episodic care into this clinical setting would meet the needs of the clinic and be beneficial for long term clients, caregivers, and therapists. After much deliberation, the capstone student and mentor collaboratively decided that developing a caregiver questionnaire would be an appropriate entry point for introducing episodic care to this clinic. This questionnaire was developed using information gained through therapist interviews, mentor feedback, and reflected the core ideas found in the literature. The shared decision making tool created by McQuiddy et al. (2019) was used as a reference during the development of this questionnaire. Questions targeted parent concerns, home program participation, and interest and feasibility of episodic care.

Figure 1: The Caregiver Questionnaire

In order to gain feedback from the target population of this project, the capstone student developed a pilot program in which the caregiver questionnaire was piloted among caregivers of current long-term clients at Kids Therapy Spot. Therapists selected 4 to 8 clients on their caseloads who are considered or are expected to become long-term clients and whose caregiver both drops off the child and picks up the child from therapy consistently. Questionnaires were distributed to selected caregivers at the beginning of their child’s therapy session and retrieved at the conclusion of the same session. A total of 21 caregivers participated in completing the pilot questionnaire. Responses were recorded and data was generated based on identified trends. Following the conclusion of the pilot program, the capstone student gave a presentation to the therapy staff at Kids Therapy Spot. Topics for the presentation included the definition of long-term clients, development and piloting of the questionnaire, results of the pilot, implementing the questionnaire in practice, and using motivational interviewing strategies when communicating with caregivers. A total of 10 therapists attended from the OT, PT, and ST departments; however, a copy of the presentation was provided to all therapists for independent viewing.

PLAN FOR PROJECT EVALUATION

In order to evaluate the caregiver questionnaire, a series of questions was developed to identify the effectiveness of each section of the questionnaire. The evaluation table tool was attached to the caregiver questionnaire during the pilot study, and respondents were asked to provide feedback after completion of the survey. A summary of their responses can be viewed below (Figures 2 and 3). Responses were generally positive, with 86% of respondents indicating they would be open to taking a break from therapy in the future and 38% indicating they are currently interested in having a conversation about taking a break from therapy. The therapist presentation was evaluated using a post-test that targeted knowledge gained and interest in utilizing the developed questionnaire. Responses were overwhelmingly positive, with 100% of therapists in attendance indicating they are currently interested in using the questionnaire in their practice.

PROJECT SUMMARY AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

At the conclusion of this capstone project, a parent questionnaire was developed, piloted, evaluated, and fully implemented for use with long term clients at Kids Therapy Spot. Therapists at this clinic were trained on implementing the questionnaire and in using motivational interviewing strategies during communication with caregivers. Future action steps for fully implementing episodic care in this setting may include the following: creating accessible home programs and resources for parents to utilize during the break period, developing an accountability system for home follow through, and implementing a system or schedule for rotating long term clients on/off of the caseload. The episodic care model of practice has the potential to change the “norm” of continuous care for long term pediatric clients in favor of a more cyclical course of treatment. Further research is needed to determine the lasting effects and overall implications of this model of treatment.

Figures 2 and 3: A summary of the questionnaire evaluation responses

