Using Virtual Space to Provide Group Support and Education to Families Affected by Concurrent Disorders

C. O'Grady[1], W.J. Wayne Skinner[2]

[1]School of Nursing, York University, Toronto, Canada ; [2]Ambulatory Care & Structured Treatment Program, The Center for Addiction & Mental Health, Toronto, Canada

Introduction

Caregivers and other family members of loved ones suffering from co-occurring mental health and substance use problems (concurrent disorders) have traditionally been ignored and excluded when their ill loved one becomes involved in the formal treatment system. Although the evidence indicates that family involvement is an important determinant of positive client outcomes, family members continue to identify support / education as unmet needs.

Objectives

To demonstrate that family internet interventions have the potential to overcome barriers to service delivery, such as transportation, distance, critical mass for group participation, anonymity, and other restrictions that limit access to hospital services.

Aim

This presentation will describe a research program that aimed to support families affected by current disorders. It will focus on an original project that used virtual space available through internet technologies to offer facilitated peer support groups to families affected by concurrent disorders. The goal of this pilot study was to test the effectiveness of delivering an online version of a previously evaluated face-to-face family CD support group. Participants will learn about an innovative mixed-methods research initiative that invited family members to participate in an online support / educational group, based on the manual 'A Family Guide to Concurrent Disorders".

Methods

The author employed an innovative mixed method research design to evaluate several variables related to the recovery process of family members affected by concurrent disorders.

Results

The integrated quantitative and qualitative results demonstrated the effectiveness of the online family group on both subjective and objective variables.