

PERMA Model and Mental Health Practice

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ABSTRACT--- *In this paper, we reflect on how Positive Emotion and Meaning elements of Seligman’s PERMA Model were used in assisting Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD) patient achieve own wellbeing during work placement. Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is a global public mental health disorder affecting more women than men. In the UK, it accounts for 5.9% of all mental health disorders and the number of people suffering from GAD continues rising. GAD contributes to negative economic and social impacts on individuals, families, communities, and the nation. Therefore, it is imperative that effective evidence-based interventions are used to enhance the wellbeing of those who suffer from this condition.*

After using the intervention developed using Positive Emotion and Meaning elements of Seligman’s PERMA Model, the patient showed increased interest and participation in quizzes, pools, and TV watching. He also increased his time spending in communal areas chatting with his peers. He started advocating the activities he was engaged in as therapeutic and recommending them to other patients. He developed positive attitudes towards these activities in that he thought they were preventing him from being bored and from having ill thoughts which would have increased his anxiety levels.

We concluded from these results that the use of Seligman PERMA Model’s elements of Positive Emotion and Meaning is useful in developing and implementing intervention that are effective in helping Generalised Anxiety Disorder patients achieve their wellbeing. We therefore recommend that Seligman PERMA model’s elements of Positive Emotion and Meaning should be considered when developing effective interventions aimed at helping GAD patients achieve their wellbeing.

Keywords---- Generalised Anxiety Disorder, PERMA Model, Positive Emotions, Meaning, Well-being

1. INTRODUCTION

Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is a global mental health disorder affecting adult men and women [8]. In the UK, it accounts for 5.9% of all mental health disorders and affecting more women than men [2]. The number of people suffering from GAD in the UK continues to rise resulting in adverse social economic impact on individuals, families, society, and the nation [2]. This article reflects on the impact of the implemented intervention that was developed using Positive Emotion and Meaning, which are the elements of Martin Seligman’s PERMA Theoretical Model on improving patient’s wellbeing. To maintain confidentiality, both the ward and patient names are anonymised as required by Midwifery Council (NMC) Code of profession conduct [10].

2. THE PERMA MODEL

PERMA is a short form for Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment [16] and are called the ‘core elements of psychological well-being and happiness’. In 2011, Seligman incorporated these elements into a model, and he believed that interaction with these elements would help people work towards finding happiness and meaningful life fulfilment. The model was published in his influential book called ‘Flourish: A New understanding of HAPPINESS AND WELL-BEING in which he explained how these can be achieved.

Positive Emotions play an important role in transforming people to become better. According to Fredrickson [4], people can achieve this if they open their hearts and minds. This enables them to develop positive emotions which allow them to discover and build new skills, new ties, new knowledge, and new ways of being. Positivity is the most obvious connection to happiness as it is more than smiling and it encompasses far more than mere physical pleasure or vague sense of happiness. It may be described as ability to remain optimistic and view one’s past, present, and future which in turn may help in leading to forming constructive perspective. Fredrickson [4] added that, ‘There is no emotion that needs to be forever

shunned or suppressed'. This suggests that people need to have appropriate negativity too which is a necessary ingredient for flourishing life, but positivity is enough to encompass full range of human emotions.

Engagement is about being occupied with activities and carrying them out with passion and commitment and it is also described as Flow. Activities that meet need for engagement, flood the body with positive neurotransmitters and hormones that elevate one's sense of wellbeing. This engagement helps people to remain present, as well as synthesize the activities where they find calm, focus and joy [12].

Relationship is about social interaction with people and forming stable relationships that contribute to happiness and wellbeing. This suggests that it is important to start friendships and encourage others to do the same. PERMA's Model of Wellbeing encourages people to build relationships [16]. Fredrickson [4] stated that 'whether you build temporary connection or a lasting bond, these ties create the social fabric that weaves you into the social world that surrounds you'. This notion is supported by Pascha [12] who stated that 'positive relationships with one's parents, siblings, peers, co-workers and friends is a key ingredient in building strong relationships and it provides support in difficult times that require resilience'.

Meaning, according to Pascha [12], this is about 'having an answer to the question: why are we on this earth? Which is a key ingredient that can drive us towards fulfilment'. 'Living a meaningful life is related to attaching oneself to something larger than oneself. It instils the sense that there is a larger purpose to life and being a part of it confers meaning'. Heintzelman and King [6], argued that 'the human experience of meaning in life is widely viewed as a cornerstone of well-being and central to human motivation'. As such, when we are trying to find meaning, there is a need to assess skills and values that we need to use in helping us finding a sense of purpose. For example, one should be interested in activity in order to participate. Seligman [15], said that 'the meaningful life involves the use of strengths in the service of something bigger than one's direct focus'. An example of this is providing for family, serving in the community, or participating in religion.

Accomplishment is about having goals and ambition in life which can help us to achieve things that can give us a sense of accomplishment. Mulder [9] said that 'it is primarily about making efforts to improve one's performance that involves challenges that help to improve person's self-image to allow him to be proud of performance delivered'. She added that 'this strengthens confidence resulting in increased happiness and well-being. Goals that are achievable lead to feeling of satisfaction and motivate someone to keep going'.

3. FRED'S (PATIENT) JOURNEY TO WELLBEING

The principal author was on second year Nursing Associate Trainee (NAT) work placement at a mental Health Unit and was assigned to look after Fred (not his real name) who was a male patient, transferred from another hospital because wanted to be close to his family. The trainee attended his admission process as part of learning opportunity. A Registered Nurse (RN) introduced Fred to the trainee. Fred responded 'so we are both new' the trainee responded yes, and he was assured that he would receive appropriate care support.

Fred was stable, polite and in pleasant mood in the first week and engaged well with other patients and healthcare team members. But in the second week, he started showing negative behavioural attitudes to other patients and pushing boundaries though manageable. Despite change in his behaviour, he was receptive to health advice given to him by his key nurse as per his care plan. He used to reiterate words of assurance of 'working together on the journey to recovery.' This encouraged the key nurse to support him so that he could progress to well-being.

At Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) meeting, Fred's mental health condition and how he could be supported further were discussed. He was commended for his participation in quizzes, pools, watching TV and spending time in communal areas chatting with his peers. This positive feedback from his key nurse pleased him. As a result, he became involved in planning his care and setting goals to be achieved. He asked MDT for support with more therapeutic activities to occupy himself when he felt distressed or anxious. He said, 'I just want to be doing things that can make me feel happy.' The MDT recommended that Positive Emotion and Meaning which are the elements of PERMA Model should be applied to help Fred feel happy and find meaning in life. Fred was taught about these two elements of PERMA model and agreed to work on new activities that were developed using these PERMA model elements including drawing and colouring, gym, and swimming. He understood what Positive Emotion and Meaning of PERMA Model are and followed them through. As a result of engaging with these activities, Fred became a champion of therapeutic activities. He encouraged other patients to find their own path to recovery with support from MDT. He worked out his own 'journey to well-being'. He advocated these therapeutic activities and recommended them to other patients on the ward. He told them that the activities prevented him from being bored and having ill thoughts which would have negative impact on his mental health status resulting in increased levels of anxiety as before. From these changes, it can be concluded that Fred's GAD had improved as a result of engaging with activities that were developed using Positive Emotion and Meaning elements of PERMA model.

4. POSITIVE EMOTIONS AND MEANING APPLICATION AMONG GAD PATIENTS

Seligman [14], advocated that ‘positive emotions and meaning in life are specific aspects in PERMA Model’. Fredrickson [4] commented that ‘positive emotions open us’ and ‘it helps people to foster psychological, physical, social skills and the resources that increase individual well-being’. This may be used on GAD patients as they may benefit from them if they experience more positive emotions as this will help their minds expound and be able to work towards life fulfilment, happiness and meaning.

‘Meaning’ is relevant element in the Seligman’s PERMA model, that it can be used in GAD patients. He believes that all human beings need ‘meaning’ in their lives as it helps them attain sense of well-being. Pascha [12] stated that ‘having an answer to the question- why am I on this earth? - is a key ingredient that can drive people to fulfilment’. Finding positive meaning of life is possible by allowing people engage in spiritual or religious activities [4].

Different people find meaning of their lives in different activities. However, people believe in pursuit of material wealth which makes them feel like money is the only source of happiness. Pascha [12] argued that ‘Once needs are met and financial stress is not an issue, money is not what provides people with happiness’. This suggests that seeking and working towards a meaning that is bigger and more important than your own happiness is important.

5. WELL-BEING PROMOTING EXERCISES AMONG GAD PATIENTS

Psychologists (Martin Seligman, Barbara Fredrickson, Jon Kabat-Zin and Amy Cuddy) shared their research findings which support that increasing level of positivity has positive impact on life experience. They introduced six exercises which according to Sarah [14], ‘.have shown to boost positive emotions, albeit with a certain amount of commitment and practice’[18]. These techniques are appropriate and can be used on GAD patients to cultivate positive emotions and meaning in life. Patients are actively engaged during these activities. Pascha said that ‘we all need something that absorbs us into the current moment’ [12]. Patients can choose among different techniques based on their preferences. Despite their mental condition, patients are entitled to make choices as NMC [10] code states; ‘Avoid making assumption and recognize diversity and individual choice’. Some of the exercises they can engage in include journaling, practising mindfulness, cognitive behavioural therapy and shifting perspective.

Journaling is one of exercises that GAD patients can do with support of Occupational Therapist (OT) basing on assessment of patient’s writing skills, attitude, and commitment. Patients write down few things they are grateful for. The idea is to reflect on previous day, week or month and remember 3 to 5 things which they are grateful for. They need to be guided on time, space, and frequency of journaling. Battey [14] said ‘When journaling becomes a banal task and not an enjoyable practice then you need to adjust amount of journaling you do’. This practice can increase quality of sleep, decrease symptoms and sickness, and increase joy [7].

Practising Mindfulness is exercise in which patients are asked to take 3 deep breaths and mindfully tune into their thoughts and emotions, observing them as they flow freely. Various techniques can be practised to train mindfulness of brain including full body scanning and mindful breathing. ‘Mindfulness is a skill. It doesn’t come naturally. Like learning to play the piano or hit a good backhand in tennis, it requires instruction and practice’ [4].

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) exercise is called ‘talking treatment’, which can help patients understand how some ‘habits of thinking’ can cause anxiety or worsen it. It can be done in groups or individually weekly or several weeks or monthly. Patients use ‘practical exercises, brief tests and dynamic website programmes to identify and use their highest virtues’ [15].

Shifting perspective exercise allows patients to find several time slots in each day and asks, ‘what is going right for them?’ This assists patients in shifting from negative to positive emotional state by cultivating positive emotional experiences. It also allows patients to imagine what life could be like if they could thrive emotionally, physically, and socially. Negativity is important too [4]. How patients feel would be the best version of themselves in every situation, relationship, and interaction.

All these tools, activities and questions were used with Fred, and they helped him to learn to coach himself to thrive in every moment. These interventions developed using positive emotions and meaning which are elements of PERMA model helped him become committed and progressed to the road of recovery. However, the appropriate information resource was provided and was told how to access information pertaining to stipulated exercises needed for cultivating positive emotions. He was also signposted to other services such as health minds and resources such as those that are online and free [1, 5, 11, 13 and 17]

6. CONCLUSION

This reflective account concludes that implementing interventions that are developed using Positive Emotion and Meaning which are elements of Seligman’s PERMA Model can make a difference in improving mental health wellbeing of GAD patients. Therefore, it should be encouraged.

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