Occupational Therapy and People with Alzheimer’s Disease

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June 20th is the summer solstice, the day with the most sunlight. The Alzheimer’s Association uses the longest day to raise awareness and funds to advance the care, support and research efforts of the association. The Research & Education SIS wants to use this day to shine some light on the role of occupational therapy in supporting people with Alzheimer’s disease and their caregivers.

By 2025, the number of people aged 65 and older with Alzheimer's disease is expected to reach 7.1 million people, a 27% increase from the 5.6 million age 65 and older in 2019 (Alzheimers.net). In the absence of effective pharmacotherapy there is an urgent need for nonpharmacologic interventions to improve the lives of people living with Alzheimers’ disease. Occupational therapy professionals play a critical role in supporting both people living with dementia and their caregivers.

Raj et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review of home-based occupational therapy for adults with dementia and their informal caregivers. Moderate evidence supported interventions provided jointly for adults with dementia and their informal caregivers using a combination of intervention strategies. They concluded that combining individualized interventions framed with client-centeredness can enhance occupational performance of adults with dementia, reduce caregiver burden, and improve informal caregiver’s sense of competence.

The Tailored Activity Program (TAP) is an evidence-based occupational therapist-led intervention for people living with dementia and their care partners. Jeong et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of the Tailored Activity Program. They found that participation in TAP resulted in decreased neuropsychiatric symptoms, improved occupational performance and quality of life, and decreased caregiver burden. This study presents evidence supporting the active application of TAP for community-dwelling people with dementia.

A randomized controlled trial of a recollection-based occupational therapy intervention for people with mild Alzheimer’s disease was conducted by Kim (2020). The recollection-based occupational therapy program consisted of five nonpharmacological interventions consisting of physical, horticultural, musical, art, and instrumental activity of daily living and applied it to those having a mild Alzheimer’s disease. The experimental group participated in a total of 24 sessions (five times per week for one hour per session). The control group took part in regular activities offered by the existing facilities. The experimental group presented improved cognitive functions, reduced depression, and enhanced quality of life.

This small sample of research focused on occupational therapy and Alzheimer’s disease supports the positive impact the profession can have on the lives of people living with Alzheimer’s disease and their caregivers.

References:

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