

The effect of horticulture therapy (HT) for frail residents in nursing home: A pilot study

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Background HT is the use of living plants to promote therapeutic effects in people. It has been used for various populations, for example dementia and palliative care patients. Experience towards gardening by older people has been found to be positive. However, rigorous studies on HT have been limited. Therefore the effects of HT need to be further examined. Before developing a full scale study, a pilot study is vital to explore the impact of HT. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to report the effects of HT on frail elderly nursing home residents.

Method This study was conducted in a nursing home in Hong Kong. Two consecutive sessions of therapy were held on two days in August 2010 by a nurse under supervision of a registered horticultural therapist over 6 participants. Non-participating observation is used as the data collection strategy and the process was recorded by the trained persons by using field note and audio recording. The audio record was transcribed into verbatim. The data was coded into brief categories first and then common themes were abstracted to form the final conceptual themes.

Result From the preliminary result, it was observed that HT has effect on emotional feeling, motivation, fine motor functioning, social interaction, sensory stimulation and thinking about the past. Among those domains, majority of the effect was positive; while some negative effects were also noted.

Discussion This study showed that HT is feasible to be conducted on the frail elderly people in nursing homes. Intervention protocol should be refined in order to eliminate the negative effects. Larger scale quantitative research is suggested to follow in order to find out the quantified effect of HT.

Keywords horticulture therapy, gardening, frail elderly