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The impact of a virtual reality training programme on health professional knowledge, understanding and empathy

Dementia is one of the major causes of disability and dependency among older people worldwide. Virtual Reality programmes offer a new and innovative sensory distortion programme designed to provide participants with a greater understanding of people living with dementia. To date, limited research has been undertaken on the impact of such programmes. A mixed method transformative design was used to achieve the study aims. Qualitative techniques, focus groups and semi-structured interviews, were used to inform the instrument development prior to administration and again to examine how the VDT training impacted on practice. A quantitative repeated measures research design was used to measure changes in the knowledge, understanding and empathy levels a purposive sample (n=133) of health care professionals taking part in a Virtual reality training programme. A psychometrically acceptable tool was used to gauge of the intervention. The intervention allowed participants to experience symptomology of stage 4 (Moderate) dementia. Full ethical consent was sought and

gained. The use of qualitative findings ensured the validity of the instrument to the VDT training programme. The findings demonstrated a positive and statistically significant impact on participant's knowledge, understand in empathy. Participants also reported that they felt they had overestimated their knowledge regarding dementia prior to training and that the training allowed them to 'walk in the shoes' of the person with dementia. Statistically significant changes were noted across Nurses, Allied health professionals, health care assistants and medical staff. Almost all (95%) participants recommend the programme as an effective training tool. Participants reported that the VDT training had a significant impact on practice and helped to bring their theoretical understanding of dementia 'to life'. The virtual reality experience is an effective, well received training programme providing a unique opportunity to experience dementia. All training must be embedded in an overarching programme of facilitation and practice development in order to maximize potential for translating its impact into practice.

Biography

Paul Slater is a lecturer in statistics at Ulster University, Northern Ireland. He is a Psychologist and a lecturer in statistics. He has fifteen years' experience as a researcher in the areas of Psychometric testing of instruments, Anxiety Disorders, Assessment tool development, Organisational Culture research, older people Assessment, Person-centred Practice and Suicide. He is also advisory editor for the International Journal of Older People Nursing and Physiotherapy Practice and Research.

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