Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) is a catastrophic event impacting an individual’s life and influences every aspect of care for self, family, and community. Sexuality and sexual function is a major sense of identification of who an individual is and influences cognitive identification of oneself with humanity and relationships with mankind. It is vital for individuals with a spinal cord injury to have sexuality and sexual function education woven into a rehabilitation program to help individuals regain identity of themselves and in relation to others to help build confidence to re-enter the community after rehabilitation. The Interdisciplinary Team approach for rehabilitation provides input from all medical professionals: Physician, Social Worker, Psychologist, Pharmacist, Dietitian, Nursing, and Occupational, Physical, Kinesio, and Recreational Therapists. The goal of therapy is to educate the individual on physiological changes sustained after having a spinal cord injury and increasing knowledge of how to maintain a healthy sexual lifestyle. Sexuality and sexual function does not end when an individual sustains a spinal cord injury and educating individuals helps regain confidence and responsibility in meaningful relationships or developing meaningful relationships after leaving the hospital environment. Individuals can regain their sense of self-confidence and fulfill their desires and dreams with education designed to meet sexuality and sexual function after spinal cord injury.

Background into Spinal Cord Injury

- Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center
- Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Center
- 2-20 bed Acute Rehabilitation Nursing units
- 10 Certified Rehabilitation Nurses (CRRN)
- 2 Nursing Case Managers (1 CRRN Certified)
- Occupational, Physical, Kinesio, and Recreational Therapists

Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Questionnaire:

- Assess nursing understanding of sexuality and sexual function post SCI
- Assess nursing staff’s willingness to learn
- Identify educational needs
- Develop educational topics to increase knowledge

Results of Questionnaire:

- Survey questionnaire for nursing staff developed
- Nursing participation in questionnaire/survey
  - Registered Nurses: 30
  - Licensed Vocational Nurses: 22
  - Certified Nursing Assistants: 4
- 40 questionnaires/surveys returned

Collaboration with SCI Colleagues:

- Physicians
- Psychologists & Mental Health
- Pharmacist
- Dietitian / Nutrition
- Occupational, Physical, & Kinesio Therapists
- Case Managers
- Nursing staff (RNs, LVNs, & CNAs)

Role(s) of SCI Nursing Staff:

- Consult with Interdisciplinary Team members
- Patient education when appropriate
- Setting limits on behavior when indicated by patient or staff
- Providing privacy for patient and spouse/significant other

Education for Patients, Significant Others & Family Members:

- Sexuality and sexual function post SCI
- Assist with setting realistic expectations and goals for sexual intimacy post SCI

Education for Nursing Staff:

- New nursing staff orientation and training
- Annual review training for nursing staff
- Collaborate with Psychology & SCI Clinical Nurse Educator
- Address educational needs indicated in questionnaire/survey
- Discuss with appropriate Therapy staff regarding assistive devices or techniques needed for successful sexual functioning

Outcomes:

- Nursing’s increased knowledge with sexuality and sexual function
- Increasing personal comfort level to discuss sexuality
- Collaboration with Team members effective to meet veterans needs
- Increased patient acceptance & satisfaction with life changes/events

What Is Being Learned:

- Improved quality of life for Veterans with a SCI
- Increased knowledge with sexuality and sexual function post SCI
- Sense of self, confidence and fulfilling desires and dreams improves
- Sexuality is a life-long experience for each individual

References:


Tabitha C. Rivers, MSN, RN; Tabitha C. Rivers, PT, DPT, NCS, WCC; Joshua Duong, FNP-C, RN; & Julius H. Penning, MSN/ED, RN, CRRN