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Improving the Lives of Coast Mental Health Patients Through Increased Extracurricular Opportunities

For

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Introduction

Coast Mental Health is a non-profit organization that was founded in 1972. Coast's mission is to assist and support the recovery of those living with mental illness. For the past three years, I have been volunteering with Coast on a weekly basis by spending time with a mental health patient named Brendan. It is through this experience that I have realized that members of Coast rely on gift cards, vouchers, coupons and free passes in order to do activities outside of their home. I believe that if Coast were to receive more of these items from companies throughout the lower mainland, the social lives of its members would be greatly improved. I plan to speak with local companies and services to determine the feasibility of this as well as inform them of the improvements that would be made to the lives of mental health patients. A possible limitation to this study could be difficulties communicating with those in charge of providing coupons, vouchers, tickets and free passes at various companies. I will conclude this report by specifying which companies/services are willing to carry out my proposition and I will include the benefit it has had or will have on patients at Coast Mental Health.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to determine the feasibility of increasing the amount of extracurricular activities available to Coast Mental Health patients in hopes to improve their overall well being and happiness.

Scope of Inquiry

To assess the feasibility of improving the social lives and happiness of Coast Mental Health patients, I have pursued these 4 areas of inquiry:

1. What percentage of patients surveyed would like to do more activities?
2. What type of activities would patients like to do more of?
3. What local businesses/services would like to help provide Coast patients with an increased opportunity to do social activities?

4. What issues may prevent Coast Mental Health Patients from receiving help?

Methods

I collected my primary data by having patients of Coast Mental Health conduct a survey that I provided. Through doing this I accumulated the data needed to determine what type of activities are desired, what portion of those surveyed want an increased opportunity to do activities and the feasibility of providing this increased opportunity. I then formulated graphs which highlight the answers to the questions above. My secondary data includes scholarly articles that highlight the positive effects that the chosen activities have on mental health patients.

Conclusion

By providing Coast Mental Health patients with increased opportunity to do extracurricular activities, we can vastly improve their happiness and wellbeing. This report determines the percentage of Coast Mental Health patients that would like an increased opportunity to do activities outside of the home, what type of activities patients would like to do, what local businesses/services are willing to do to provide this opportunity and what issues will come between Coast Mental Health patients and gaining an increased opportunity to do extracurricular activities.

Data Section

Do Coast Patients Desire the Opportunity to Do More Activities Outside their Home?

It has been determined that 69% of Coast Mental Health patients surveyed would like the opportunity to do more activities outside of their home while roughly 30% would not. These patients believe that increasing their opportunity to do activities will increase their happiness and well being. This is reflected in a study done by Hendrix, Green and Perrin which concluded that participation in a greater number of activities (regardless of activity type) results in greater recovery from mental illnesses. The

same group determined that the activities done can be varying levels of social and physical and can occur in or out of the home (1). Figure 1 shows the distribution of Coast Mental Health Patients who want to do more activities compared to those who don't.

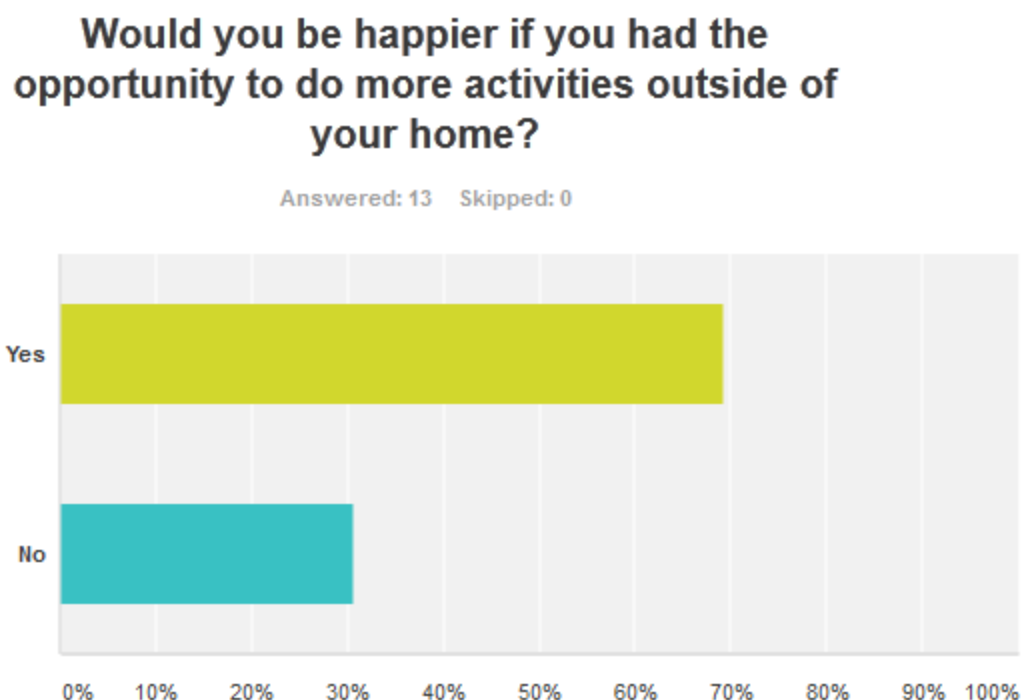


Figure 1. Coast Mental Health patients that would like to do more activities outside their home vs. those who do not.

What Type of Activities/Outings Would Coast Mental Health Patients Like To Do More Of?

After separating the Coast Mental Health patients that want an increased opportunity to do activities from those who do not, it can be concluded that there is a wide but even distribution of desired activities. The four most desired activities are organized physical activities, artistic activities such as painting and crafts, visiting museums/art galleries and going to the movie theater. The complete distribution of chosen activities can be seen below in Figure 2. It should be noted that allowing mental

health patients to make their own decisions when it comes to things like how to spend their time promotes recovery. Empowering patients also has positive effects when it involves making decisions to do with types of treatment, medication, meals, clothing and many other things (2).

The activities that Coast Mental Health patients have chosen are interesting because numerous studies have proven that physical and artistic activities promote an improved mental health status in patients. For example, work done by Caddy, Crawford and Page in the *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing* has determined that activities of artistic expression decrease the negative symptoms of many mental health disorders. Although it had been posited, this study was the first to actually measure the improvement in mental health patients who engaged in artistic expression over a designed period of time. Caddy, Crawford and Page monitored 403 patients from 2004-2009 to gather this information (3).

It is also very encouraging that Coast Mental Health patients would like to have more opportunity to do physical activity. A study done by Richardson, Faulkner, McDevitt et al which polled 234 mentally ill people revealed that only 12 percent of them had engaged in designed exercise during the past two weeks compared to 35% of the general population (4). This lack of physical activity can be mentally and physically detrimental to mental health patients (such as those at Coast Mental Health). The well known physical health benefits of exercise are even more important to those with mental illnesses. The mentally ill are often more susceptible to diseases of poor physical health because they either lack the motivation to engage in exercise or they just don't have the means to do it (4). Increasing the physical activity done by Coast Mental Health patients will not only improve their physical health but it will improve patients mental health as well. Exercise/physical activity has been shown to improve the mood of mental health patients through the body's release of endorphins just as it does in healthy people. Furthermore, physical activity is proven to reduce social isolation, improve self-esteem and increase general awareness in the mentally ill (4). Richardson, Faulkner, McDevitt et al

recommend that mental health patients engage in physical activity 3 times a week for 20-60 minutes at a time. They suggest incremental increase in activity duration/intensity as is comfortable for the patient. Group physical activity is often more effective due to its social aspects, however, solo exercise is usually cheaper and more convenient for mental health patients (4). The optimal variations of physical activity/exercise for Coast Mental Health patients will be taken into account in the “recommendations” section of this report.

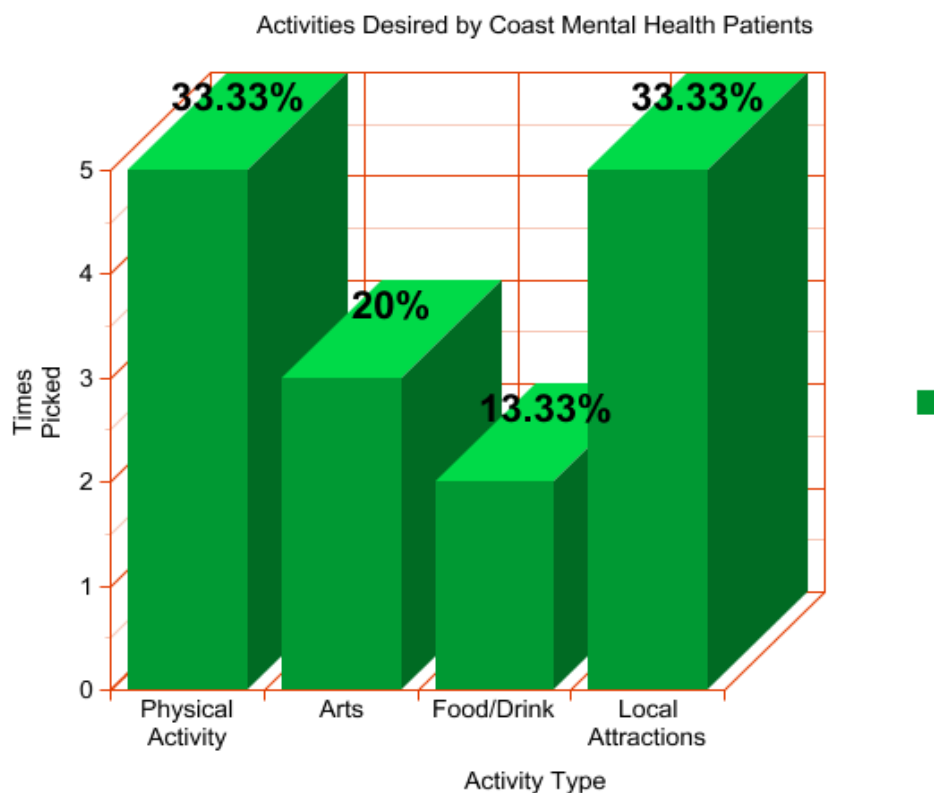


Figure 2. Percentage of Coast Mental Health patients that would like an increased opportunity to do each type of activity.

Conclusion

Almost 70% of Coast Mental Health patients surveyed wish to have more opportunities to do various activities outside of their home. Of these 70%, 33% wish to do more physical activity, 20% want to do

more artistic activities, 13% want to experience more local restaurants and coffee shops and 33% desire to visit more local attractions. These results are very encouraging because academic studies have shown that activities of artistic expression can decrease the negative symptoms of mental disorders by instilling self confidence and creativity in patients. The desire to participate in physical activity (exercise) is also extremely positive because it has been shown that mental health patients engage in far less exercise than does the general population. This is concerning because mental health patients are already at increased risk for diseases like diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure due to having a lack of motivation for physical activity or from not having the means to do it. Furthermore, physical activity and exercise can provide patients with a decreased sense of isolation, increased self-esteem and an improved mood due to the natural release of endorphins. Although there is more evidence in favour of artistic and physical activities, empowering mental health patients to decide how they want to spend their time (new restaurants, coffee shops, movie theatres, local attractions) has also been shown to have a positive effect on overall well being. This report will be reevaluated and improved as I continue my research. Information on which local businesses and services provide concession for mental health patients in order for them to do things outside of their will be added. A section on the possible barriers of allowing Coast Mental Health patients to do the activities that have become available to them will also be presented.

Recommendations

The evidence in favour of increasing the opportunity of Coast Mental Health patients to do activities outside their home along with the barriers to doing so has been presented. This has allowed the formulation of key recommendations for moving forward with the issue of Coast Mental Health patients and their opportunity to do extracurricular activities:

- Allow patients to decide for themselves which available activities to pursue
- Focus mainly on increasing patients opportunity to do physical and artistic activities because of the overwhelming evidence showing their benefit.
- More recommendations will be added as this report is finalized.

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