

What matters most in the therapeutic relationship in neurorehabilitation?

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What do we already know?

There is growing recognition of the role that therapeutic relationships have on outcome in neurorehabilitation. However, conceptual understanding of the therapeutic relationship within this context is limited.

What did we aim to do?

To explore what matters most in the therapeutic relationship from the perspective of patients accessing neurorehabilitation services

How did we do it?

- Qualitative Descriptive methodology
- Purposeful sampling
- Participants were n=15 people currently receiving rehabilitation following a neurological event.
- Semi-structured interviews
- Conventional content analysis

Why does this matter?

- This research has advanced our understanding of what matters most to the therapeutic relationship in a neurorehabilitation setting.
- Findings offer a more nuanced understanding of the therapeutic relationship in than existing theories derived in psychotherapy offer.
- Health psychologists may have a role in supporting practitioners to develop a relational approach to practice, enabling them to tap into the true potential of the therapeutic relationship as a covariate of outcome.

Connect with me as a person

The practitioner does the right thing by me through:

- knowing me, my unique context and what matters most to me
- connecting with me on a human level and seeing me as a person
- genuinely caring about me and my outcome
- sharing a bit about themselves and making me feel at ease

Just being able to relate to that person. Maybe you've got to share your life a bit you know to have had, actually had a conversation about yourselves [...] you could have someone who's incredibly competent but just not fun going to... and maybe you don't trust them [Person with spinal cord injury].

Show me you know how

The practitioner does the right thing by me through:

- demonstrating their skills, knowledge and ability to meet my unique needs
- giving me trust and confidence they will do the right thing by me
- helping me to understand their clinical decision making

So I think it's important to gain the faith of the person that you are dealing with. You have to prove to them that you know what you are doing [Person with a traumatic brain injury].

Be my professional

Just openly and honestly like we are talking now, there are no issues, they are willing to explain to me if I have got any questions or anything like that [...] they are punctual when they say they are going to be there [Person with traumatic brain injury].

The practitioner does the right thing by me through:

- being open, honest, and transparent in their communication
- sharing knowledge and checking understanding
- managing expectations
- being truly present and authentic in their interactions with me
- being passionate about what they do and pushing the boundaries of their knowledge to meet my unique needs

You get the feeling you can do the things she teaches you, and she tends to make you believe in yourself a lot more than you normally would [Person with traumatic brain injury].

Value me and my contribution

That they will listen and they will actually be interested, and they actually respect that you actually know what you are talking about [...] that the patient is the expert on what they are experiencing [Person with idiopathic intracranial hypertension].

The practitioner does the right thing by me through:

- valuing my contribution and expert knowledge
- supporting the development of partnership grounded in mutual trust and respect
- making me feel listened to and heard
- fostering dignity and empowerment

She was amazing [...] I'm maybe more capable now because I just really trusted her [Person with spinal cord injury].



I think you've got to trust that they know what they're doing, that they care about what they are doing, that they are going to do it to the best of their ability, that they've got your best interest at heart [Person with spinal cord injury].

Do the right thing for me

The X-factor

When all components of the relationship work together, the whole becomes greater than the sum of the parts. It was a special feeling that clients struggled to identify but it was obvious when it was there. It was this that clients perceived could bring about more than what could have been.