DIGITAL STORYTELLING AS A SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION FOR BEREAVED FAMILY MEMBERS

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INTRODUCTION

- Abigail J. Rolbiecki
  - Social worker & scholar
  - Narrative interventionist – Photo elicitation methods and Digital Storytelling
  - Background in trauma & adverse life experiences
  - Bereaved sibling
  - Constructivist & Storyteller

- Karla Washington
“In some ways suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning…” – Viktor Frankl
STORYTELLING AND THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

- Organization of memory in a chronological timeline.
- Developing and verbalizing the story promotes meaning-making and healing.
- Storytelling has been shown to reduce:
  - Depression
  - Anxiety
- Storytelling has been shown to improve:
  - Self-efficacy
  - Communication skills
  - Social support
  - Quality of life
DIGITAL STORYTELLING AS A SW BEREAVEMENT INTERVENTION

University of Missouri, Center for Patient-Centered Outcomes Research
- Awarded 20k internal funds

Primary Aim: Feasibility of Digital Storytelling as a Bereavement Intervention

Criteria for participation:
- Bereaved family member
- Bereaved up to 2.5 years
- Willing to participate in the intervention and share story

N = 14
- n = 6 Cancer Death
- n = 3 Dementia Death
- n = 3 Non-illness related death (e.g., accident)
- n = 2 “Other” illness related death (e.g., heart disease/death)
WHAT IS DIGITAL STORYTELLING?

- Multi-media, narrative intervention combining photography, music, and spoken word.
- Commonly used in community health intervention, education, and journalism.
- Palliative care and health storytelling research:
  - Decreased PTSD
  - Decreased depression and anxiety
  - Improved ability to make meaning
- Pediatric palliative care – legacy making.
- Adapted Gillies and Neimeyer model.

Figure 1. Adapted Constructivist Meaning-Making Model

RECRUITMENT STRATEGY

- Convenient recruitment strategy
- MU Info
  - Most successful
- Flyering
- Snowball (word of mouth)
ACTIVITIES AFTER CONSENT

In person meeting

5-day workshops (two full days; two optional ½ days; 1 final ½ day for group share)

Group story circles → script development/sharing.
  - Story Circle 1: Identifying the story; timeline
  - Story Circle 2: Sharing the narrative with the group
  - Story Circle 3: Sharing the actual digital story

Individual journaling supported script development.

Think visually
  - What photos or other artifacts can bring life to the parts of your narrative
VISUALIZING THE SCRIPT: THE STORYBOARD/TIMELINE
CREATING THE DIGITAL STORY

Recorded narratives (via iPad)
iMovie (readily available software on ALL newer apple products)
  - Free
  - PC equivalent – Windows moviemaker

Demo the digital story

Finalize and upload to sharable file
Story Circle 3 (or final story circle)
Most powerful piece to Digital Storytelling
Symbolic of a person re-entering their world with a narrative solely authored by themselves.
Reclaimed control over their story, and their healing.
PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- Main finding/goal: This is a FEASIBLE intervention approach for this study population.

- DS can be feasibly implemented in smart technology (i.e., an Apple IPad Air 2).

- Participants found the intervention helpful/meaningful
  
  - "Digital Storytelling really helped me focus on what I think the purpose of my family going through this was. I can take what we've gone through and find meaning and purpose in the [experience]."

- Participants primarily valued having devoted time and space to craft their stories (with support) and share them with others who had experienced similar loss.
QUALITATIVE DATA

- Participants felt this approach supports open communication about feelings of grief and loss.
- Participants felt this approach supported the meaning-making process, particularly in terms of them making sense of their loss experience (i.e., understanding it’s purpose in their life).
- Participants felt this would be an important intervention approach for individuals who are preparing for the loss of their loved one:
  - “there are these long periods where caregivers are waiting for their loved ones to die…having something like storytelling as a [tool] for processing grief would [be] extremely helpful.”
- Participants ended feeling proud of their product, as well as more self-confident in their ability to use technology (a finding we were not necessarily anticipating).
IMPACT ON DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

Figure 1. Distribution of Depression

Figure 2. Distribution of Anxiety
CONCLUSIONS

- Digital Storytelling is a highly feasible psychosocial intervention that holds great promise as a tool to support healing among individuals bereaved by chronic illness.

- The workshop format provided ample support for participants to learn to use Digital Storytelling technologies; including participants with varying levels of experience with such technologies.

- Participants cited the physical space, dedicated time, emotional support, and technological support as elements of the Digital Storytelling Experience that contributed to its benefit.
THANK-YOU!

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