Focus on Fidelity: Delivering What’s Intended in a Multi-site Randomized Clinical Trial

Intervention fidelity, the degree to which an intervention study is conducted as planned, is critical to ensuring internal validity, reliability and generalizability of research findings. Unfortunately, intervention fidelity is infrequently reported in the literature. Absence of intervention fidelity reporting may contribute to dissemination of potentially low-efficacy or ineffective interventions into clinical practice.

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PURPOSE:
To explicate the strategies used to assess and monitor intervention fidelity in an ongoing multi-site clinical trial. The intervention fidelity strategies used in the current study were guided by best practice recommendations put forth by the Treatment Fidelity Workgroup of the National Institutes of Health Behavior Change Consortium (BCC). The BCC’s recommendations encompass five strategy domains: (1) study design, (2) facilitator training, (3) intervention delivery, (4) intervention receipt, and (5) intervention enactment.

METHODS:
Strategies promoting intervention fidelity were developed a priori for use in a multi-site RCT testing the efficacy of a computer-assisted cognitive rehabilitation intervention for adults with multiple sclerosis. Data were collected continuously throughout the study to assess and monitor intervention fidelity related to study design, facilitator training, intervention delivery and intervention enactment.

RESULTS:
Fidelity data were gathered throughout the study’s 8-week long intervention and again at 2 and 4-months after the intervention ended. Data were extracted from audio-recordings of intervention sessions, session attendance records, audits of computer exercises completed at home by the participants, and post-intervention goal attainment scaling that suggested reasonably high fidelity to the intervention protocol.

CONCLUSIONS:
This research project demonstrates how nurse researchers may examine and report intervention fidelity guided by best-practice recommendations. Detailed attention to and documentation of intervention fidelity strategies may serve to promote scientific rigor in future studies and foster translation of effective interventions into nursing practice.

References:

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