Green Care as Psychosocial Intervention for Depressive Symptoms: What might be the Active Ingredients?

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What is Green Care?
An umbrella term for psychosocial interventions that integrate biotic and abiotic elements of nature to promote an individual’s health and well-being. Some examples include:

- Horticulture Therapy
- Animal-assisted Intervention
- Care Farming
- Green Exercise
- Wilderness Therapy

Advantages of Green Care:
- Potential for cultural diversity and sensitivity
- Capacity for low-cost health promotion and disease prevention interventions in difficult-to-target and vulnerable populations
- Key elements identified by participants include:
  - Positive and supportive atmosphere
  - Social engagement
  - Increased physical activities
  - Increased feelings of skill and competence
- Alternative formats can increase access and decrease cost

Depression and Depressive Symptoms
- Leading cause of disability worldwide
- Directly affects approximately 350 million people
- Major Depression: 
  - Present for more than 2 weeks
  - Causes significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, educational, or other important areas of functioning
- Minor Depression: 
  - Present for more than 2 weeks
  - Causes significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, educational, or other important areas of functioning

Objectives:
- Expand the consideration of green care as an evidence-based therapy for depressive symptoms
- Provide insight into possible active ingredients (social support, behavioral activation, and self-efficacy) leading to improvement of depressive symptoms

Methods:
- Followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines
- Sourced English-language articles from PubMed, CINAHL and PsycINFO through July 2016
- Inclusion Criteria for Studies
  - Depressive symptoms as outcome
  - Analyzed one of three mediators of interest (social support, behavioral activation, self-efficacy)
  - Included any psychosocial intervention for adults
  - Too few studies of key elements of green care to focus
- Each article was extracted independently
- Data combined into a matrix and analyzed for thematic content

PRISMA Diagram:

Conclusions:
- Green care interventions…
  - Can be adapted to individual's symptoms, financial means, access to care, and other characteristics
  - Offer the opportunity to target all three key elements
  - Could be led by nurses at a variety of training levels as well as community health workers

References for Reviewed Studies:


