

Introduction

This paper presents the evaluation findings of a Sophrology programme run for people with Long Covid in the Spring of 2021.

Background/Context

The Long Covid Participants

An advertisement for the Sophrology programme was posted in two Long Covid groups on Facebook. This resulted in 10 women aged between 33 and 67 years volunteering to attend the course. They were all professional women including NHS clinicians, generally off sick from work with Long Covid or working reduced hours.

A pre course questionnaire identified their Long Covid symptoms, other medical conditions, and psychological issues. Their most common Long Covid symptoms were fatigue, brain fog, sleep difficulties and joint/muscle pains. Psychological issues included anxiety, PTSD, burn out, and grief. The questionnaire also included Well-Being measures in order to evaluate the impact of the programme and identified the areas of Sophrology participants were most interested in.

The Sophrology Programme

Aims and Objectives

The analysis of the participants pre-course questionnaire informed the overall aim and objectives of the course. The overall aim was to help people in their journey of recovery from Long Covid. Objectives included:

- To teach people Sophrology tools and techniques that they could use in their everyday lives to help improve their physical and emotional well-being.
- To help people understand and implement the core principles of Sophrology including body awareness, positivity, objective reality and non-judgement.
- To focus on areas of particular concern for the group. (See themes below)

Overview of the Programme

Two groups were run using Zoom, one in the evening and one during the day. The sessions were weekly for one hour and ran for a period of 12 weeks.

The sessions were themed according to the results of the pre course questionnaire but also according to the needs and issues that arose as the groups progressed. Themes included: aiding recovery and physical well-being, positivity and emotional

well-being, managing anxiety and stress, energy management, sleep, concentration and focus, self-confidence, motivation, pain relief, self-compassion, and gratitude.

The Impact

The majority of participants showed a high level of commitment with 40% attending all twelve sessions and average attendance for the group being high at 85%.

All Well-Being measures for the group showed significant improvement, as follows:

- General outlook on life + 84%
- Physical well-being +80%
- Concentration and focus +60%
- Day to day energy +52%
- Motivation +51%
- Self-confidence +44%
- Emotional well-being +33%
- Sleep +28%
- Stress+26% (May be lower than expected due to confusion over question wording)

Participants' qualitative feedback on the programme was also very positive. All the participants stated that they had noticed benefits and changes from doing the programme, all planned to continue using Sophrology in their everyday life and all would recommend it to a friend.

It was clear that being in a group with others with the same condition was also highly beneficial for the participants as evidenced in some of the evaluation questionnaire comments.

Feedback from participants included:

"I have noticed a really big reduction in fatigue and anxiety"

"Sleeping is more normal now and I am more relaxed and feel like there is an end tunnel in sight"

"It has given me vital tools to deal with emotional and physical shortcomings including anxiety, brain fog and headaches"

"I have gained so much more energy. I still get some fall backs from time to time and fatigue but it is becoming less and less. "

"There isn't much help from the NHS Long Covid wise and to find this programme has really helped me where I felt hopeless and very alone".

"I would recommend to anybody, not only people suffering from Long Covid but as a programme to enhance your life as a whole."

“Fantastic toolkit for life”

Learning and recommendations

Significant changes and improvements were observed in the participants over the course of the twelve weeks, particularly in respect of a more positive outlook on life. This may be a small study, but it has shown that Sophrology has the potential to be very effective and beneficial for people with Long Covid.

Learning was considerable and key was:

Stressing the importance of participants listening to their own bodies and adapting the exercises accordingly. This was critically important given the wide variety of symptoms they were experiencing.

Keeping protocols short and simple, “less is more”, recognising the value of going at a slow and steady pace.

Recognising the value of the “shared experience”, as one participant stated “the community aspect was really valuable to me”.

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