



Look at what we tell you

method for clarifying support needs

Introduction

For some time a critical view is cast on the care offered to people highly depending on it. Support plans and aid programs can severely restrict people when it comes to meet their basic needs. Care has to be redefined in terms of support systems aimed at promoting the individual's possibilities to regulate one's own life. Individuals with profound intellectual or multiple disabilities are the least likely to have benefited from recent developments in this field.

To offer these clients the perspective to live a life in concordance with their individual needs and abilities the method "Look at what we tell you" was developed. Point of departure is to arrange a "dialogue setting" with the aim to set up a support system based on the perceived needs of the client. This is especially important when dealing with clients who can't make themselves understood through speech.

Purpose

Primarily the method directs its focus on people with a severe multiple impairment. Typically these are individuals with a severe cognitive impairment, motor impairments and often sensory impairments. Persons belonging to this group are mostly communicating at some form of non- or pre-symbolic level. They can be seen as having the least possibilities to manifest themselves.

The main objective of applying the method is to facilitate support by means of:

- o understanding and recording not only formal, but also practical and often inexplicit knowledge about client communication;
- o making this knowledge applicable and transferable, promoting client orientation and participation ('empowerment');
- o a multidisciplinary approach.

Recently the method has also been successfully used with individuals with other complex support needs.

Procedure

A systematic approach is used, scheduling the project route. Video recording are made, fragments of which are analysed with the aim of getting recognisable 'signals' (i.e. behaviours) of the client in various daily care situations. This serves as a starting point for the core of the method: interpretation of the observed behaviours, which finally can give rise to situation specific support planning.

There are six main steps:

Step 1. Video recordings

Video recordings of the client are made in a number of different situations (personal care, eating and drinking, specific structured activities and interactions, non-structured situations, but also client specific themes).

Step 2. Analysing: selecting and describing behaviours

A number of fragments are selected from the video recordings - based on the frequency of occurrence and marked features of the distinguished behaviours.

Step 3. Interpretation: attributing meaning

This step involves the 'process of sense making'. A discourse is organized with staff, relatives and client involved professionals, during which selected video fragments and behaviour descriptions are presented in a way that meaning (i.e. 'functions') can be attributed to them. The aim is reaching consensus, but alternative meanings and tentative support ideas are also recorded.

Step 4. Planning and implementing support – direct actions and formal support planning

In the course of discussion often concrete plans for alternative approaches are suggested. These can be considered as hypotheses for practice: what works and what does not. Besides these practical plans questions, answers and agreed on support activities are recorded to create a new or adapted general support plan.

Step 5. Transfer & instruction: the client DVD/CD-ROM

The client DVD/CD-ROM can be used as an audiovisual resource for information and planning agreements. It can also serve as a personal introduction aid to new staff members. Available information from different sources can be made easily accessible and even specific care instructions can be added. This can be used to promote an interactive support practise, with a historical view ("time line"). Optional can be the linking to (online) client information systems.

Step 6. Supplementing the method

In supporting staff members while practising the new achievements specific techniques can be used. Video interaction training (with its focus on client-staff interactions) can be used to assess behaviour variations. Observation training can be put into action to gain more insight in unexpected behaviours and complex situations. Learning to assess one's own reactions in specific situations can be the focus of further staff training. The client DVD/CD-ROM can play a role in connecting these techniques to the results of the 'Look at what we tell you' method.

It must be emphasized that all of this "only" reflects the current state of affairs. Behavioural changes, changed conditions or needs or changed situational factors can call for adjustments of the practical and formal support planning. Applying the method demands adopting a dynamic approach, (partly) rerunning the process on individual themes.

Results

Aggregating the results from different surveys a number of effects are to be seen.

On the side of the client it shows that:

- Client is more active, more alert and more responding. Often it is reported that the client is more relaxed.
- It can be seen that the client is able to contribute to the course of the different support situations (and *really* does, i.e. the influence effect).

- Relatives of the client can equally attribute to the process and get more grasp on the support planning.

On the side of staff personnel one mentions:

- Change of attitude in observing and in making contact, signals are recognised earlier.
- Client's needs become leading in the daily support practice. Staff members are more conscious of the ways they communicate with the client.
- Cooperation increases and the tuning of support is part of the process, exchange of knowledge, alerting on behaviour changes.
- Less working according to time schedules.

Further information

website (dutch): www.kijknaarwatwezeggen.nl

e-mail: knwwz@zoutmeer.nl