Laughter Is the Most Effective Geriatric Medicine

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Abstract

Introduction: Laughter is a natural part of our life. It is intimate and inborn. Infants begin smiling during the first week of life and laugh out loud within months of being born. Even if you did not grow up in a household where laughter was a common sound, you can learn it at any stage of your life.

Aims and Objectives:
- To study the knowledge regarding laughter therapy among geriatric age
- To study the knowledge regarding effect of laughter therapy over health of geriatrics
- To suggest suitable recommendations based on study finding

Material and Methods:
1) Study Design: Cross sectional study
2) Study Period: Six months
3) Sample Size: 115 Patients Above The Age Of 55 Yrs
4) Study area: Private Clinics In Kolhapur & Pune

Methodology: Pre-designed pre-tested questionnaire was introduced to the patients. including age, sex, family, personal, past history, effects of laughter over our body at geriatric age etc.

Questionnaire were prepared with reference to Bertrand Russell.

Data collection was done with prior consent of subject.

Results: Out of total patients: Min Age 56, Max Age 69 and Mean Age 61.25
Knowledge regarding laughter therapy was 49.13%.
Knowledge regarding effect of laughter therapy over geriatric health was 56.32%
Knowledge regarding effect of laughter therapy over diseases was 40.65%

Conclusion: Knowledge regarding laughter therapy is not satisfactory among people. Clearly laughter is the best medicine. It can be effectively used as part of a complementary program for promoting good health and in the prevention and treatment of various diseases.

KEYWORDS: Laughter, medicine, geriatric age.

Introduction

The term gerontology comes from the Greek Words 'geron' which means old man & Ology means the study of, so the term gerontology means study of 'old age' (1). Aging is a gradual change which takes place in our body from birth to death.
This change is seen in relation to physiological, emotional, social & spiritual aspects of an individual.(1)

- The number of elderly people is increasing in almost every country.
- In India 3.8% of the population comprises people above 65 yrs of age
- By 2030 elderly population will be 21.8% of total population. (2)
- Stress is a complex syndrome that manifests as sadness and disappointment with life.
- The study of humour & laughter & its psychological & physiological effects on the human body is called 'Gelotology'
- Although risks to health do increase with age, changes of ageing depend on the individual
- Some individuals adopt & adjust easily but some require coping with these changes. (4)
- Humour is an instrument which can be used to assist the elderly in facing some of the disappointments of old age. (1)
- The ability to laugh at oneself, at others & at situations stimulates trust commitment & a positive sense of working together.
- Humour offers a tool for patients families & staff who deal with the elderly for stress management.(5)
- So laughter is one way to feel free & happy

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- To study the Effect Of Laughter Over Diseases

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Statistical Analysis:

Data obtained were analysed by using proper statistical method.
Results and Discussion

1) In this study age group was included from 55-70 yrs.

In Section One

2) In Section one assessment of knowledge regarding laughter therapy was done by giving questions What is laughter therapy? What is importance of laughter therapy? Is laughter therapy a joke? Is laughter cost effective and easily accessible? Is laughter therapy an exercise? Is laughter therapy a group exercise? In this part 28.26% were don't know, 22.6% no and 49.13 yes. Maximum number of awareness was seen in age group of 66-70 yrs i.e. 68.18%.

Laughter club is based not on humour or jokes but rather on laughter as a physical exercise.(5)

(Study of Ko HJ, Youn CH) in their study concluded that laughter therapy is cost effective and easily accessible.

IN SECTION TWO
3) In Section two questions regarding effect of laughter over health were included.

- Is laughter reduces stress?
- Is laughter improves immunity and lung vital capacity?
- Is laughter acts as an anti-aging, painkiller, muscle relaxant?
- Is laughter improves happiness, positive attitude, self confidence?

In this group don't know 28.40%, No 15.26%, yes 56.34% were seen.

Maximum percentage of awareness regarding effect of laughter therapy over health was seen in age group 66-70 yrs i.e. 83.88%.

1. Anti Stress:

- Laughter is one of the best muscle relaxants. (5)
- Laughter expands blood vessels so that there is proper blood circulation to our vital organs brain, liver, heart, kidney spleen etc. (5)
- Also there is proper circulation to extremities & all muscles of body. (5)
- It reduces stress hormones epinephrines & cortisol. (5)
- Difference between Meditation & Laughter therapy(6)
- In meditation one needs to concentrate a lot to take your mind away from distractin thoughts.
- But laughter does not require concentration; it is easy meditation which brings you instant relaxation.(4)
- So mind related diseases like anxiety, depression, nervous break down & sleeplessness get reduced. It has benefited patients who are on heavy antidepressant drugs.(4)

Makes Us Younger

- When we exercise we do workout of all muscles of our body except facial muscles.
- Laughter is an excellent exercise for our facial muscles.
- It tones up the muscles of our face and improves facial expressions. (5)

Strengthens the Immune System: (6)

- Our immune system plays the most important role in keeping good health & keeping away infections, allergies & cancers.
- It has been proved by psychoneuro immunologists that all negative emotions like anxiety depression or anger weaken the immune system of our body.
- So that we are vulnerable to infection
- According to Dr. Lee S. Berk from Loma Linda university, California, USA, natural killer cells (NK cells – a type of white cells) & also raises the antibody levels.
• Research has found that after laughter therapy there is an increase in antibodies (immunoglobulin A) in the mucus of nose & respiratory passages which is believed to have protective capacity against some viruses, bacteria & other micro organism.

• There are many members of laughter clubs who have noticed that the frequency of common cold, sore throat & chest infection has decreased.(6)

Natural Pain Killer
• Laughter increases the level of endorphins in our body (6)
• Which are natural pain killers
• Norman Cousins, an American Journalist who was suffering from incurable disease of the spine was benefited with laughter therapy when no pain killer could help him
• So endorphins released as a result of this therapy may help in reducing the intensity of pain in those who are suffering from arthritis, spondylitis, muscle spasm etc...
• Many women have reported reduced frequency of migraine (6)

Self Confidence through Laughter
□ When you are laughing in a group at a public places with your arms up towards the sky, it removes your inhibitions & over a period of time you become a more sociable, unreserved & outgoing person.(7)

Inter Personal Relationships (4)
Laughter brings people together & improves interpersonal relationships.
• All the members of a laughter club meet each other with open mind & they care for each other.
• They are like family members.
• They share their grief & sorrows.
• People come together & greet each other with smiling face. Gradually it also adds to your self confidence.
• It will also help to develop your personality & leadership qualities. (4)

Social Benefits of Laughter
□ Ongoing research shows that old age people suffering from depression are more prone to many illnesses like high blood pressure, heart diseases, diabetes, cancer etc.(7)
• Depression also affects immune system.(7)
• Common causes of depression at the age are social, isolation & a diminished family value.
• But laughter gives them hope to swing in their life.
- Laughter therapy is free medicine for our life.(4)
- The laughter club of Johnson Garden (Mulund) has produced more than thirty anchor persons.
- After joining laughter club you will find dramatic change in your personalities.

In Third Section

- Knowledge regarding effect of laughter therapy over high blood pressure was 54.78%.
- Knowledge regarding effect of laughter therapy over psychological disorders was 60.86%
- Knowledge regarding effect of laughter therapy over Asthma was 34.78%
- Knowledge regarding effect of laughter therapy over HIV/ AIDS was 12.17%

**High Blood Pressure and Heart Disease**

- There are different causes of high blood pressure & heart disease.
- But most important cause of all is stress.
- Laughter definitely helps to control blood pressure by reducing the release of stress related hormones & bringing relaxation.
- In experiments it has been proved that there is a drop of 10-20mm pressure after participating for 10 min. in Laughter session.13
- It does not mean that those who are on treatment will become treatment free because blood pressure is a silent killer.
- It takes years to develop high blood pressure
- So it can not reverse within a few days.
- But laughter therapy can control and arrest further progress of the disease
- Similarly those who are suffering from heart disease in those patients (3)
• Laughter improves blood circulation and oxygen supply to the heart muscles (3)
• Those who have had heart surgeries can participate in laughter club (3)

**Bronchitis and Asthma**

• Laughter does the same job, more easily and almost free of cost.
• But before joining laughter club, asthmatic patient should consult to respected doctor because if there is severe bronchospasm they may cause some discomfort.
• The most common cause of repeated attack of asthma is infection but we know that laughter increases our immune system.(6)
• Stress is another cause which can be reduced by laughter so that asthmatic attacks get reduced.(6)

**Psychological Disorders**

People with suicidal tendencies have started living with more hope (4)

**AIDS and Cancer**

• The effect of laughter on our immune system is considered to be very significant in regard to deadly disease like AIDS & Cancer.
• AIDS patients who underwent laughter therapy showed surprising improvements.

The study conducted on HIV / AIDS Patients showed increase in WBC count.

The results are providing reliable statistics that shows that this is not a myth. So be ready to laugh to health. Laugh to life.


**Observation**

1. Awareness regarding laughter therapy is more in age group 65-70.
2. Knowledge regarding effect of laughter over HIV-AIDS is very less.
3. Rest of knowledge regarding awareness and effect of laughter over health is average.

**Conclusion**

Knowledge regarding laughter therapy is not satisfactory among people. Clearly laughter is the best medicine. It can be effectively used as part of a complementary program for promoting good health and in the prevention and treatment of various diseases.

**Recommendations**

• Play with a pet.
• Go to a “laughter yoga” class.
• Goof around with children.
• Do something silly.
• Make time for fun activities
• Watch a funny movie or TV show.
• Go to a comedy club.
• Read the funny pages.
• Seek out funny people
• Share a good joke or a funny story.
• Host game night with friends.

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References