

YouTube: a useful tool for the older generation?

With its videos of unlikely singing sensations, sneezing pandas and tap-dancing cats, YouTube has become an international phenomenon. But, as well as being a source of amusement to the bored office worker, YouTube has the potential to be a valuable tool in reminiscence therapy for older people with depression or dementia. This article reviews the benefits of reminiscence therapy and explores how YouTube could be used in this treatment.

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Reminiscence therapy involves verbal or non-verbal exploration of themes and stages of life based on past activities, events and experiences, with another person or group of people over a number of weeks. This is often moderated by nurses, speech and language therapists, occupational or recreational therapists and is assisted by pictures, old news clippings, life story books or videos. Systematic review has not shown conclusive benefit for people with dementia,¹ but this may be because the numbers of randomised controlled studies available for review are small and different methods of reminiscence therapy were employed. Recent small-group studies and a meta-analysis have shown that reminiscence groups can significantly improve well-being and decrease withdrawal in people with depression or dementia.^{2,3} The

benefits of group interaction and cognitive stimulation for people with dementia have also been shown in a recent randomised controlled trial. It demonstrated significant changes in cognition and quality of life after participants took part in a seven week cognitive stimulation programme, which included warm-up activities, reality orientation, cognitive problem-solving activities and reminiscence. The results were comparable to those from drug trials for dementia.⁴ However, such therapy sessions can be limited by their very nature in topic, format and scope by the impaired communication of participants, impaired cognition as to make reminiscence impractical, lack of suitable reminiscence material or lack of a flexible, easily accessible, reproducible reminiscence experience.

Case study

One of the authors of this article (DRC) regularly uses YouTube for personal musical, sporting, political and recreational reminiscence. He has found it to be an invaluable educational resource for both the young and the old.

At a family gathering, an 87-year-old grandmother was asked to name her favourite classical singer. Although Dr Collins expected her to say 'Enrico Caruso' or another well-known tenor, she said her favourite was the lesser known Tito Schipa. A quick search of the videos on YouTube provided a black and white clip from 1929 of Schipa singing 'Una Furtive Lagrima' from L'Elisir d'Amore.

As well as giving an older woman the opportunity to see someone she had probably only

YouTube Search Browse TV Shows

Tito Schipa sings Una furtiva lagrima- 1929 video

ruizdechavez 156 videos

UNA FURTIVA LAGRIMA
DONIZETTI: L'ELSIR D'AMORE 1929

0:11 / 2:37

ruizdechavez — February 18, 2009 — Raffaele Attilio Amedeo Schipa "Tito Schipa" (1888 1965) was an Italian tenor. He is considered one of the fine... **728** views

Dr Collins found that the use of YouTube allowed an elderly woman to reminisce with her family about her favourite tenor, Tito Schipa

heard before, the video prompted the whole family to reminisce and discuss what they had seen. For Dr Collins, the event also raised an interesting question: could YouTube be used as a valuable recreational and reminiscence tool in older patients with or without cognitive impairment?

History of YouTube

YouTube was launched in 2005 and has become one of the world's fastest growing websites. Its tagline "broadcast yourself" largely describes

the website's ethos of encouraging people to upload and share videos, music and images in a web-based community library. Free to users, it is funded by banner advertising, sponsorship and partnerships.

A benefit of YouTube is that it allows users to create personal accounts and store favourite playlists, which can be tailored to the interests of an individual or a group, or to a topic of interest. YouTube also provides musicians, comedians and other artists with the opportunity to promote their work and profiles. However, a potential disadvantage of this is

that a search on YouTube may produce overtly promotional, irrelevant or inappropriate videos for what is required. Additionally, some videos may infringe copyright laws. If notified of a potential copyright breach, YouTube will withdraw the video.

Using YouTube for recreational therapy

YouTube has many potential advantages for recreation and reminiscence in older people. Apart from the cost of setting

up a computer with an internet connection, YouTube is a free service. It is relatively simple to use and instruct upon, and it has a library of sporting, musical and political events that older people may be interested in viewing.

The authors of this article have successfully searched for past coronations, celebrities of the 1930s and 1940s, and post-war celebrations. But, as observed in the case study, older people may be interested in seeing lesser known stars and events of their past. Therefore, finding some videos on YouTube may require more research than finding others.

The recreational value of such a resource for older people, who are often unable to access centralised libraries, buy expensive DVDs or use complicated multimedia formats, is obvious. YouTube does require broadband access with fast download speeds to be effective, but broadband is now available in most urban areas. Also, the modern computer equipment required for a broadband connection is becoming increasingly affordable. For older people who do not have internet access in their homes, internet resources (with relevant instructions) could easily be made available through day centres, day hospitals or internet cafes that cater for the “silver surfer”. Silver surfer cafes could use larger screen fonts, voice activated controls, touch screen technologies and could have a reduced pricing structure.

The use of such technology and resources in the “re-connection” of an older generation in modern society should not be underestimated. It should be at the core of government policy considerations for older people. One potential idea is to remove

the VAT on internet connections and computer equipment for older people.

YouTube offers an extensive range of material, with linked subjects and themes that can guide further reminiscence and discussion in a group setting. In addition, as playlists can be saved, discussions can easily be resumed and themes continued from session to session and shared more easily between groups. It could also be possible, through web cameras, to conduct reminiscence sessions remotely involving family and carers.

The healthcare professional can also use YouTube as a guide on the techniques, style and contents of reminiscence therapy (eg, see <http://tiny.cc/1hcju>). But, more research on this area is needed to define themes and materials of interest to older patients.

Authors' research

The authors have been conducting a study of a reminiscence therapy group using patient-generated YouTube playlists over six months.

Each session of the group has five to six participants, all of whom have early-to-moderate dementia. The members of the group select a playlist, which has been generated from simple questions about their favourite music or memorable events. After viewing the video clip, the group discusses its contents. The sessions consist of one hour per week for a period of weeks. Although the study is still ongoing and in the early stages of evaluation, the results so far suggest that this modality of reminiscence therapy is possible in a hospital environment, enjoyable for patients and staff, and useful in generating group discussions. It also appears to have a powerful effect on patients'

ability to recollect and interact after reminiscence sessions. Nursing staff have reported that patients with poor short-term recall and limited interaction are more talkative, are more capable of discussing what they saw, and seem to look forward to the next session. The authors intend to publish the initial report of their study later this year.

Conclusion

YouTube has the potential to be a feasible tool to use for reminiscence to stimulate cognition and interaction in people with mild-to-moderate dementia. It could also improve interaction and cognition.

It seems intuitive that YouTube may have important social and recreational uses for older people. Providing access to YouTube in the home, day centres and society, may be beneficial in “re-connecting the generations” in a hyper-cognitive and hyper-technological world.

Government and social health policy should take into account the value of such technologies for older people.

We have no conflict of interest

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