



## The continuum of evidence in creative arts therapies: From case report to meta-analysis



The Arts in Psychotherapy publishes research reports which draw on a wide range of research methods and approaches. Within the imperative of Evidence Based Medicine (EBM) the case report is often considered a weaker type of evidence. However, the detailed case report can be valuable in multiple ways. For example, the case report can assist new practitioners to learn and understand the complexity of practice and to enact self-compassion. The role of countertransference and how to deal with frustrations, hope, and fantasy are able to be considered in supervision with reference to the case literature. Reading cases can assist understanding of the therapist's presence and thinking, and responses of the client or patient when such presence and thinking is enacted creatively.

If we perceive EBM within the creative arts therapies to exist on a continuum, at one end we would need to place the case report and at the other the systematic review. Many readers will be familiar with the pyramid of evidence where the smaller number of meta-analyses are represented at the pointy top end and expert practitioner opinion is at the wide bottom end.

Many clinicians and practitioners in other fields of healthcare practice have grappled with applicability of the evidence hierarchy, especially the limitations of the findings of some randomised controlled trials for providing direction for real world practice. Sturmborg (2019) suggested that the RCT has limitations because the "... most obvious question: why does it work well in some, variably in others and not at all in yet another group of patients with the same condition is, if ever, rarely asked." (p. 711).

The case report provides a way to reflect on approaches to practice. For example, in a report of telehealth offerings to veterans (Spooner et al., 2019) the authors provided four case studies indicating evidence for the value and appropriateness of telehealth delivery to vulnerable clients.

A case report reflecting on provision of Body Oriented Psychological Therapy to a patient with mixed dissociative conversion disorder and co-morbid depression indicated the sensitivity of the therapist in finding a way to come alongside the patient in a time of great distress (Papadopoulos & Röhrich, 2018). The patient's lived experience is honoured, beyond their diagnosis and symptomatology. In other reports a program can represent the case context rather than contact with only one participant (Fisher, 2019). This provides a wide range of useful information for practitioners.

At the other end of the evidence continuum the meta-review or meta-analysis of Randomised Controlled Trials can provide support for the impact and effect of creative arts therapies. For example, strong positive effect for music therapy in reducing cravings, enhancing contemplation, improving readiness for treatment, and assisting motivation

was found in a review of creative arts therapy studies (Megranahan & Lynskey, 2018). Researchers should also consider how data can be further operationalised or *mined* to find new information (for example Edwards & Parson, 2019).

The Creative Arts Therapies need many research approaches to provide evidence for effective practice. Evaluation is crucial within programs to assist in supporting and developing highly informed and relevant research programs (Kaimal, Jones, Dieterich-Hartwell, Acharya, & Wang, 2019). Observations and reflection by highly trained and expert practitioners brings new insights and opportunities within research. Reading widely, consulting the literature outside of the field, and being open to new realities within the management of practice are good skills to bring to the practice space.

In this final editorial for 2019, and in conclusion of my service as Editor-in-Chief after five years, I am assured of the unwavering support of the editorial board and reviewers for the journal. The guest editors worked hard through 2019 to get the special issues into publication. For the special issue on creative arts and the military I would like to extend my thanks to Dr Alisha Ali and Dr Craig Haen, and for his work on the special issue to honour Professor Emeritus Colwyn Trevarthen I would like to thank Dr Stephen Malloch. Good luck and strength be yours dear journal.

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