Choosing & Using External Memory Aids in Acute Rehabilitation

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Review the Basics
Types of Memory

- Short term memory and working memory - short term storage of information
- Semantic memory - facts and knowledge about the world
- Episodic memory - memory for events
- Procedural memory - encoding for procedures
- Explicit memory - awareness of storing a memory
- Implicit memory - no awareness of storing the memory
The memory process

Attention: Paying attention to the task and also the amount of focus/sustained attention one has for the task

Encoding: Making sense and meaning of the information to prepare it for the next step

Storage: Storing the information in the relevant location in the brain

Retrieval: Being able to access the stored information when needed
Memory and Executive Functions

- Executive functions play a role in awareness of strengths and limitations, goal setting, planning and organization, self-monitoring, and flexibility.
- External memory aids may “cross over” to address both memory and executive functions to some extent.
- Training the patient using context-based and errorless learning strategies is necessary to use the external aid OR training of therapy team, family and/or caregivers may be necessary for successful use.
External Memory Aids
When to Use Them

Is the patient aware of deficits?

Yes

Can patient use notebook or electronic device with assistance?

Yes

What is the patient’s level of impairment?

Mild/moderate

Use memory strategy training

Use both as needed

Severe

Continue to use external strategy with assistance, as needed

Use both as needed

No

Use techniques to increase awareness

Use task specific approaches: errorless learning, spaced retrieval, chaining

Use external strategies only: providing cueing and assistance

AND

No
Types of Memory Aids

High Tech

- Smartphone calendars, to do lists, notes, alarms or timers, etc.
- HUGE variety of apps that can be downloaded for specific needs -- just search the app store

Low tech

- Calendars
- Planners
- To do lists
- Notebooks
- Checklists of steps for a task
- Post-it or index card reminders
- Signs and labels
Examples

- A daily notebook where daily events are recorded, including therapy tasks and progress
- Memory notebook with information about family, friends, and important past events
- Daily schedule
- List of steps for a given task posted where the task takes place
- List of items needed
- Post-it reminder on door for what to bring to therapy
- Covering parts of the bed/TV remote so patient can use key parts more independently
Choosing & Training
Choosing

- Pick your external memory aids based on short term needs
  - Safety concerns
  - Decreasing burden of care/increasing independence
  - Based on patient or family identified needs for discharge home
- Keep them as simple as possible
  - Easy for the family and caregivers to implement AND immediately applicable to the patient’s life at home
Choosing

- Identify needs by working with PT, OT, the patient, family, and caregivers
  - The physical and occupational therapist are great resources to identify areas that are impacting safety and independence related to discharge home
- You must consider the requisite skills the patient will need to use the chosen external aid
  - Are those skills trainable using systematic instruction and/or errorless learning?
  - Will you, the rehab team, and/or family/caregiver need to provide certain cues or set up?
TRAINING

- You must be systematic and consistent in training and educate your PT/OT to be systematic and consistent in using the external aid or aids
  - First you will train acquisition or the skills or procedures to use the tool
    - Chain the steps
    - Isolate steps that are difficult and mass practice
    - Use distributed practice
  - Then move on to mastery or generalization training
    - Focus on efficiency or fluency of use by timing the task
    - Help client generate when and how the tool can be used
Training

- Be clear about the expectations of using external aids and support role (i.e., cueing) the family or caregiver may need to provide at home
  - Listen carefully to what the family says is feasible for them
  - The family/caregiver WILL need multiple opportunities to work with you/the patient and train on using external aids


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