Float REST Therapy as a Therapeutic Tool for PTSD Patients

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INTRODUCTION
Sensory deprivation flotation tanks were developed by John C. Lilly, along with his Restricted Environmental Stimulation Technique (REST) in 1977 (Nienhuys, 2005). Recent research involving flotation REST has shown its effectiveness in reducing stress, anxiety, and depression (Sven Buud, 2006). While these studies have included “patients with stress-related ailments” (Sven Buud, 2006), they have excluded civilian patients (non-military) with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (along with other neurological disorders).

OBJECTIVES and SIGNIFICANCE
1. This study will test the hypothesis that cortisol levels will decrease, in civilian patients with PTSD, as they experience Float REST therapy.
2. Past Qualitative studies have shown participants feel many significant benefits after Float REST sessions through testimonials.
3. Quantitative studies have used EEG’s, blood pressure measurements, and many other forms of surveys.
4. A quantitative study examining the relationship between cortisol levels (in civilian patients with PTSD) and Float REST therapy is needed in order to gain a better understanding of how Float REST therapy can be used as a therapeutic tool to treat PTSD.

UNDERSTANDING PTSD
- PTSD’s initial symptom is the activation of the body’s “Fight or Flight”. In order for the Stress Response to be activated, the HPA axis must be in synchronization. The HPA axis is a network that consists of the hypothalamus, the pituitary gland, and the adrenal glands.
- The Stress Response sends adrenaline throughout the body, causing heart rate and blood pressure to increase. It also influences the level of other hormones in the body, such as cortisol.

HOW THIS RELATES TO FLOAT REST THERAPY
The relaxation response is the “physiological counterpart” of the stress response (Sven Buud, 2006) and has been proven through testing to be facilitated by flotation REST therapy. PTSD patients suffer from a variety of symptoms that include anxiety, depression, lack of sleep/restless sleep, and hyper vigilance (Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2015). Many of these symptoms are shared with other anxiety related (Delaney, 2013). Conclusive testing would bring clarification to the usefulness of this form of therapy for this population of patients.

POSSIBLE IMPACT
- According to researchers, “a high priority need exists for implementation of EBTs (evidence-based treatments for PTSD in a broad range of mental health training and service delivery organizations” (Stimun, 2015).
- The U.S. The civilian population has 7.7 million adults in the U.S. suffering from PTSD (National Institute of Health, 2009) who have limited therapeutic tools available to them. Prescription medication, which can cause patients unintended side effects, and traditional counseling are the most popular forms of therapy for PTSD patients.
- A patient’s healing process could be aided by alternative methods.

CONCLUSION
- The need for alternative methods and applied therapies for PTSD patients is well established.
- With the resurgence of interest in flotation REST therapy and the research that has followed, it is an emerging field of study that could help PTSD patients find relief.
- There should be further testing that studies the benefits of flotation REST therapy on PTSD patients, specifically the civilian population of PTSD patients.

Materials and Methods
A typical flotation tank dimensions are 8’ x 3.75 x 3.5’
- Float REST therapy is conducted in flotation tanks.
- These tanks are shallow pools filled with warm water that has been mixed with a high concentration of Epsom salt.
- Special consideration of claustrophobia is taken into account by ensuring patients that they are in control of their experience if they wish to leave a light on or a door open.
- Most sessions last at least 40 minutes

References

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