



INSIDE REHABILITATION SPECIALISTS

Promoting Prevention - Providing Treatment
for People with Brain Injuries and Neurological Impairment
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Welcome to the Spring issue of Inside Rehabilitation Specialists. In this issue we profile the work of Dr Vera Anselmi who discusses the problem of Anger Management after brain injury and offers a practical model of intervention applicable for patient, family and clinicians' use.

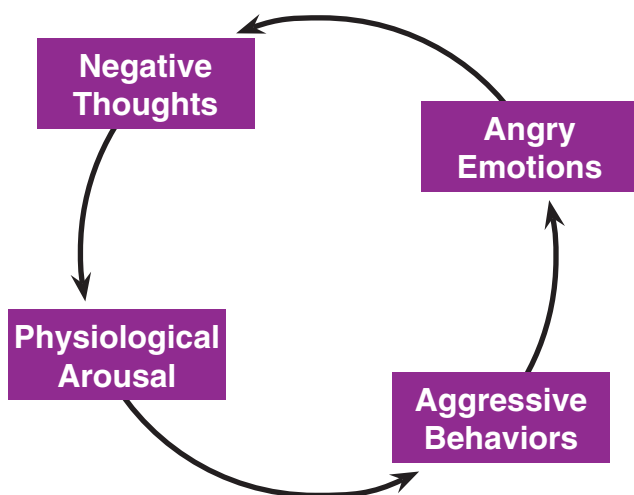
Dr. Anselmi will be conducting a workshop on this topic at the Brain Injury Assoc of NJ conference in May. Also featured will be workshops with Dr. Dustin Gordon of RS on substance abuse and TBI and a workshop I will be presenting on behavior challenges and caregiver stress. For info on the conference please contact BIANJ at 732-738-1002.

Dr. Carnevale can be contacted by e-mail at gcarnevale@rehab-specialists.com

Anger Management Following Brain Injury

Despite the myriad of problematic symptoms following brain injury, angry, aggressive behavior is among the most challenging to deal with. The key to decreasing these behaviors involves behavioral and cognitive strategies. Anger itself is a basic, human emotion that can serve as an adaptive response to stress. However, it becomes dysfunctional when its frequency, intensity, or duration is excessive, and then is "acted out" in aggressive actions – either verbal or physical. Teaching individuals with brain injury to express anger in a constructive way is the goal of Anger Management.

Based on a theoretical approach to anger, Novaco (1993-4, Stress Inoculation Treatment for Anger Control) identified four components of the anger response which interact in a circular fashion. Treatment interventions can occur at any of these levels: physical arousal, negative thoughts, angry emotions, and aggressive behaviors.



Anger Management involves teaching people strategies to address all four of these areas, such that intervening at any one point will affect the whole system.

- To reduce physiological arousal: use calm breathing and simple muscle relaxation
- To reduce angry emotions: self-monitor levels of anger to establish awareness and reveal patterns of anger in different situations. Use of a Daily Anger Record to record vital information is particularly important in persons with memory deficits.
- To reduce aggressive behaviors: construct a hierarchy of angry situations and evoke each of these situations in your imagination, while relaxing away tension
- To reduce angry negative thinking: use thought stopping and

calming self-statements to counteract old habitual angry automatic thoughts. Distraction techniques are also helpful (e.g., engaging in interesting or "busy" activities and thoughts, leaving the situation physically or mentally, etc.).

This general approach to managing anger may need modification for certain individuals with brain injury, especially those with serious cognitive deficits who require a more structured, behavioral approach. Analysis of antecedents and consequences of an angry response may be necessary, and intervening when possible in these areas (e.g. removing triggers to anger and over stimulation in the environment) may also prove useful. Providing positive reinforcement immediately, continuously, and consistently across settings and caregivers will ensure success. Some individuals may need to learn new ways of explaining themselves effectively if their anger is justified. It is helpful to teach assertiveness skills in order to clearly state wants or needs, while at the same time respecting the needs, wishes, and feelings of others.

-Vera Anselmi, Ph.D.

Dr Anselmi is a clinical psychologist in private practice in Parsippany. She can be reached at vanselmi@aol.com

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About AACBIS

Rehabilitation Specialists proudly supports the mission of the American Academy for the Certification of Brain Injury Specialists (AACBIS) which seeks to provide uniform training standards for those who work in brain injury services. We are also proud to announce our first four staff members have passed the national exam and have been certified as Brain Injury Specialists. For more news and information, please visit our website at www.rehab-specialists.com.

New Research Studies

In collaboration with Kessler Medical Rehabilitation Research & Education Corp. (KMRREC), we are assisting with recruitment of participants in several research projects designed to improve the quality of life for persons with brain injury. These studies involve development of better memory retraining techniques, identifying areas of the brain responsible for improvement in cognitive rehab for persons with TBI and MS, and use of medication to improve language functioning in stroke patients. Eligible participants can receive up to \$100.

For further information, contact Nancy Moore, KMRREC research coordinator at 973-530-3660 or Dr Carnevale at 973-636-9366 x 25.

