

Minutes, Working Group 1, COST Action 866 Brussels, December 2006

Workshop 1 of COST 866 addressed three specific issues – development of a sound and rigorous methodology to study Green Care; development of a theoretical and conceptual framework to support and explain Green Care and examination of examples of practice in Green Care to inform research.

An introduction to the study of the health benefits of green care was given by Marjolein Elings (Netherlands) and Rachel Hine (UK).

Theoretical and Conceptual Models and Frameworks

Bjarne Braastad presented a conceptual framework based on his work and that of Bente Berget and their group in Ås, Norway. The presentation examined the psychological theories underpinning animal assisted interventions (AAI) for people with mental ill health. The framework drew on cognitive theory, attachment theory, the Biophilia hypothesis and learning theory in order to explore the benefits to human mental health of human to animal contact.

Joe Sempik presented his model relating to the benefits of Social and Therapeutic Horticulture (STH). This was based on a review of the literature on STH and a study of 25 garden projects carried out by him and his colleagues at Loughborough University. The model took into consideration the variety of processes associated with the practice of STH, for example, development of work and social skills, connectedness with nature and other processes, in addition to the frameworks of social inclusion and employment.

These two models would form the core for the development of a theoretical framework for understanding and exploring STH and Green Care.

Yolande Hadden and Rex Haig (UK) compared the concepts and principles associated with therapeutic communities with those of green care and drew some very interesting parallels and contrasts. This will help to inform and develop the work on theoretical and conceptual frameworks of green care.

18 members of the group offered to provide a contribution to the work on conceptual models and frameworks. These contributions will be of around 5000 words and will be submitted by the end of March 2007. They will be edited by Joe Sempik, John Hegarty and Rachel Hine and a draft report will be prepared and circulated prior to the Vienna meeting (June 19 – 22, 2007). The work will be presented at the meeting and any additional changes/editing will be identified and carried out shortly afterwards. A report will be published, under the COST imprint, after the meeting in Vienna.

[Action: all contributors to submit articles by 31 March 2007; edited document to be circulated by 1 June 2007]

Development of methodologies to study green care

Discussion of the methodology used to study green care centred around the difficulties of carrying out controlled studies (for example, what activities should be used as ‘controls’, use of many different outcome measures) and new innovative approaches to research. Erik Baars (Netherlands) introduced to the group the method of *statistical process control* and its application to health and well-being research. This approach may be particularly valuable to explore the effects of green care, especially when a smaller sample is used. Additionally, Erja Rappe (Finland), John Hegarty (UK) and Simone de Bruin (Netherlands) presented their recent research and their approaches and findings were discussed by the working group.

A questionnaire was circulated to record participants’ views on the perceived strength of the evidence base supporting green care, the perceived need for experimental evidence and the methods currently employed by researchers in the field. Results from the survey will be circulated to members of the working group once the results are analysed.

Additionally, working group participants agreed to circulate details of publications and methods which would be of particular interest to members. These included, for example, the CORE outcome measures (Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation) and details of statistical process control.

[Action: all those who have not yet completed the questionnaire on researchers’ views and methods used should complete it and return to Joe; WG members with information/publications which are useful to the group to circulate details]

Experience from Practice

Lis Sorensen (Denmark), Giorgio Guerani (Italy), Konrad Neuberger (Germany) and Lavinia Rosi (Italy) presented their experiences of the practice of green care. Issues arising out of practice have implications both for the methods selected to study green care and for the development of a conceptual framework. The individual (micro level) analysis of green care presented by Konrad will be incorporated into the (macro) conceptual model of green care being developed by the group.

Topics for discussion for COST 866 meeting in Vienna, June 2007.

Potential Keynote speakers: Roger Ulrich and/or Stephen Kaplan (they are known to Patrik Grahn, perhaps Patrik could approach them?) have carried out research on nature and health for many years and have slightly differing theoretical viewpoints. Their publications address both practical (methodological) issues and theoretical constructs (e.g. Attention Restoration Theory) in the study of nature and health. Their given title (or any other keynote speaker's) could be:

“Researching the health benefits of nature: theory and methods”

They can develop that as they wish as long as they stay within the general boundaries of the title.

Suggestions for invited speakers:

Anita Unruh from Canada – she has developed and used the Attention Restoration Scale and her work therefore fits in with the Kaplans' theory of Attention Restoration.

Howard Frumkin – to speak about the need for rigorous methods (he gave such a lecture at the Toronto conference on therapeutic horticulture in 2002 and a similar lecture to COST E39).

Diane Relef – to provide the historical background to researching nature and health.

Terry Hartig – to speak about the use of physiological monitoring for exploring the benefits of green care.

Suggestions for workshops/presentations

Methodological approaches

We need to build on what was said in Brussels but not simply repeat it. What could be new?

- We could start with a presentation by Howard Frumkin...
- A short introduction based on information on perceptions of researchers of evidence base and methods used – from my little survey in Brussels. Plus, results from a larger survey of practitioners of therapeutic horticulture of their views of evidence and views of around 10 senior psychiatrists of the need for RCTs/experimental studies.
- Further information on methods such as statistical process control
- Presentations from responses to the ‘call for abstracts’ on the theme of methods used in the study of green care.
- Start work on a database of researchers and the methods used to study green care

- Start work on a report that reviews methods used by researchers in green care and outcome measure, for example, such as CORE and statistical process control

Latest Research Evidence

This workshop could be based on abstracts received which describe the latest research findings on green care including, farming for health, animal assisted therapy, nature therapy, therapeutic horticulture and other nature-based therapies (Rachel's survey of care farming in the UK and her literature review will be ready by then).

Conceptual Framework

We need a workshop session to present and discuss the conceptual model.

Glossary of Terms:

We need a small workshop to finish off the glossary of terms database. There was insufficient time at the Brussels meeting to do that task. This can be, perhaps, a 'drop-in' session where delegates can come in small numbers to enter corrections and additions to the glossary of terms.

The Call for Abstracts

priority will be given to presentations in the following categories:

- that present new evidence from research on the benefits/effects of nature based therapies and approaches including farming for health, therapeutic horticulture etc
- that develop or provide a critique of conceptual and theoretical frameworks and models of green care
- that review and critically examine the methods used in green care research or that present the application of new methods or approaches to green care