

SFT Newsletter Summer Edition, 27 June 2009

***Veldzicht and Mesdag Recruiting Patients! 61 Total
Patients Already Recruited for Study!***

***First Results Presented in Edinburgh: SFT Showing
Promise in Psychopaths***

Bernstein and Smit Seek More Ministry Money for Clinics in the Study

Dear Colleagues,

It has been quite a while since I have last written. There have been so many exciting developments in the past several months that it is hard to know where to start.

Accomplishments

- FPC's Veldzicht and Mesdag began recruiting their first patients three to four months ago. In this short time, each of these clinics has already recruited 9 patients. Congratulations to the project teams at both clinics for this impressive accomplishment. Special thanks to Mariet Slaats, who has managed the difficult task of recruiting these patients at both Veldzicht and Mesdag simultaneously. Kudos also to Irma Timmerman and Wim de Hoop, the project leaders at Veldzicht and Mesdag, respectively, and to Tina Hanneman, who has recently taken over the project leader position from Wim.
- With the addition of these new patients, along with the continuing recruiting at the van der Hoeven, we now have a total of 61 patients, more than half way to our goal of 114. With the Kijvelanden preparing to recruit its first patients shortly, and Assen planning to start recruiting in the fall, we are now poised to meet our enrollment goal over the next several months.
- So far, 22 of the first 25 SFT therapists in our project that have had their therapy tapes with practice patients rated have been able to achieve competency in SFT. This is an extraordinary achievement. We appreciate the commitment of the many SFT and TAU therapists in the study. Without your efforts this study would not be possible.
- We have recently trained a new group of SFT therapists at 3, 2-day workshops that were given the spring through the Expertise Center Forensische Psychiatrie (EFP). Welcome to the new therapists that are joining our project. Thanks also to Chistine-Esther de Vrijer of the van der Hoevenkliniek and Truus Kersten of de Rooyse Wissel, who co-led these workshops.

- We presented our first international symposium on forensic SFT at the annual meeting of the International Association of Forensic Mental Health Services (IAFMHS), which was just held in Edinburgh. The symposium was organized by FPC de Rooyse Wissel. Truus Kersten presented the case of a psychopathic patient that has made impressive progress over the 4.5 years she has treated him with SFT. Marije de Vos presented initial findings on schema modes in psychopathic patients, which supported our hypothesized mode model for psychopaths. Elsa van den Broek presented an integration of SFT with drama therapy that holds promise for evoking child modes and accessing emotions. And David Bernstein presented a progress report on our randomized clinical trial, along with some initial results. The symposium was very well attended and enthusiastically received. I am hoping that this becomes the first of many international presentations on our clinical work and research on forensic SFT.
- We now are beginning to analyze the data from our initial cohort of 35 patients that entered the study at de Rooyse Wissel, Oostvaarders, and van der Hoeven in 2007. These patients have already been in the study for 18 to 24 months, so we can begin to get a “sneak preview” of how treatment is working.
- Our initial findings suggest that SFT may be particularly effective in psychopathic patients. Seventy percent (7/10) of the psychopathic patients (PCL-R total score ≥ 25) treated with SFT received authorized leave (“verlof”), compared to 33.3% (3/9) of the patients given treatment as usual (TAU). In contrast, SFT and TAU appeared to be about equally effective in the patients with lower psychopathy scores (PCL-R < 25 , 75% versus 71.4%, respectively). Thus far, there has only been one case of recidivism in the SFT condition (1/13), and one in the TAU condition (1/8), among those patients that received leave. These are very early findings that will need to be confirmed in our larger sample. They were not quite statistically significant in this small initial group. We will also need to examine recidivism over a much longer period of time. Thus, we need to interpret these early findings cautiously. However, if SFT does succeed in lowering recidivism risk to the point that many more psychopathic patients are approved for leave than is now the case, it would represent an important advance in forensic treatment.
- Elsa van den Broek has been conducting a pilot study to test the hypothesis that the integration of SFT and creative, non-verbal therapies (e.g., drama, music, art, movement therapy) may be particularly effective at bypassing patients’ protective modes and accessing their vulnerable, emotional side (“Vulnerable Child mode”). Her initial findings support this hypothesis. She measured schema modes based on videotapes of patients’ therapy sessions that were blindly rated. The patients that received the non-verbal version of SFT showed the most emotional vulnerability and the least emotional detachment of any of the 4 treatment conditions, including verbal SFT, non-verbal treatment as usual, and verbal treatment as usual. These initial findings suggest that creative, non-verbal methods may enhance the effectiveness of standard verbal SFT interventions, and vice versa. Congratulations to Elsa for these promising results!

- Marije de Vos has recently submitted an article that describes the initial reliability and validity of the forensic version of the SNAP, the informant based instrument we developed to measure changes in personality disorder symptoms over the course of the study. Marije's analyses support the reliability and validity of the new instrument, and suggest that informant based assessments are more accurate for measuring personality disorder symptoms than patients' self-reports. Congratulations to Marije, and co-authors Ellen de Jonge, Eva de Spa, Arnoud Arntz, and Lee Anna Clark, for this important research! This article is the first that we have submitted for publication using data from the SFT project.
- David Bernstein, Ellen de Jonge, and Philip Jonkers have written a chapter on SFT forensic case conceptualization, based on data that Ellen collected on a psychopathic patient that Philip is treating at the Oostvaarderskliniek. The chapter will appear in an upcoming German book on SFT.

New Developments

- Wim de Hoop has moved from the Mesdagkliniek, where he served as the SFT project leader, to Veldzicht, where he will become one of the SFT therapists for the project. Thanks to Wim for the fine job he did as project leader, and welcome back in your new role as therapist. Tina Hanneman has taken over for Wim as project leader at the Mesdag, where she is also one of the SFT therapists. Welcome to Tina in her new role!
- Merel van Vliet has taken over from Ellen de Jonge as the research assistant at the Oostvaarders. Thanks to Ellen de Jonge for the excellent job she did as research assistant for the first two years of the study! Thanks also to Merel for doing such a smooth job of transitioning into her new role and keeping the project at the Oostvaarders moving.
- Lieke Nentjes has been hired as an AIO ("Promovenda") on the SFT project, a position that is being funded by Maastricht University. Her project proposes to add experimental measures to the test battery we are already giving the patients in our study, to determine whether the capacity of psychopathic patients to process emotions improves with successful treatment. Lieke's proposal is currently being evaluated by the clinics in the project. If it is approved, Lieke will be traveling to the various clinics in the project this fall to collect data, and again about 18 months later for repeat measurements. This addition to our study would enable us to address the question of whether psychopathic patients change in fundamental ways in forensic treatment. Welcome to Lieke!
- Annette Lobbes is continuing to do an exemplary job in her capacity as coordinator for the project. Among other things, Annette has recently contributed to the studies of Marije de Vos and Elsa van den Broek on schema modes by serving as an expert rater (in a former life, Annette was an SFT therapist).

- David Bernstein has written a grant proposal that was recently submitted to the Ministry of Justice's new "innovation" program, requesting additional funds for the clinics in the SFT project. The project is being submitted under the auspices of the EFP. The budget request for €190.000 would help to cover the clinics' costs for supervision, research assistant time, and therapist time. An innovative feature is that the clinics would receive additional funds for each patient they enroll beyond a predetermined number (i.e., €2.000 for the 11th through 20th or more patients they recruit). This would provide additional incentives for the clinics to increase their enrollment, and help them to offset the costs associated with having more patients in the study. We should hear whether the proposal has been funded by mid-July. Thanks to Iva Smit for her help with this grant submission. Keep your fingers crossed!
- Recently, we had the first meeting of the SFT project oversight board, which was attended by Frank Kooijman (Kijvelanden), Lieda van der Vis (de Rooyse Wissel), Monique Kossen (van der Hoeven), and Iva Smit (EFP). The attendees were enthusiastic in their support for the project, and their commitment to helping us to meet our recruiting goals. Thanks to everyone that attended for their feedback and encouragement!

Challenges

- By far the most important challenge we are facing is to complete our enrollment. We need to reach a total sample size of 114 to have adequate statistical power. The next 6 to nine months will be crucial to reaching this goal.
- The Kijvelanden is ready to begin recruiting. They have identified 30 eligible patients, and 8 additional patients who may be eligible but need further screening. They have 4 SFT therapists that have already been found competent, based on scoring of their sessions with practice patients, and 2 additional SFT therapists that are still in the process of being trained. Unfortunately, recruiting at the Kijvelanden has been delayed by the unexpected departure of 2 research assistants that had been assigned to the project. However, Erwin Bijlsma has expressed his intention to begin recruiting as soon as possible, even before a replacement research assistant is found. Thanks to Erwin for "going the extra mile" for our project!
- FPK Assen has been delayed in starting the project because of lack of funds for a research assistant. We have included funds for a research assistant for Assen in our recent grant submission. Assen has also experienced the departure of one of their SFT therapists, Karen Chateau, who will need to be replaced. Marike Lancel and Bert de Jager have affirmed their commitment to making the project happen at Assen. Their SFT therapists are still in the process of being trained, and will be ready to be rated for competence in early fall. If everything comes together, Assen will start recruiting in the fall of this year.

We are now in reach of meeting our goals. Our initial findings are very promising. I look forward to our continuing work together on this ground-breaking study. Thanks to everyone for your efforts to make our project a success!

Best wishes,

David