USE OF THESSES

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A MEMORY RETRAINING PROGRAM
FOR THE HEAD INJURED

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Essay submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Applied Psychology at the Australian National University
Memory impairment is a common feature of post head injury symptomatology. Moreover memory impairment continues to be complaint for a considerable period following the head injury and hence represents a particular area of concern to professionals involved in the rehabilitation of head injured patients.

There are few reports of programs for remediation of organic memory impairment and this lack is probably a reflection of both the incomplete knowledge of the nature of the memory impairment in the head injured as well as the massive demands on a clinician's time for preparation and delivery of a comprehensive program.

A review of research into organic memory disorders and normal memory function, plus an examination of the features of brain disturbance in a head injury, yielded a number of hypothetical explanations of the nature of the memory deficits in the head injured. Some behavioral factors were considered also.

A program was devised on a cost-benefit basis aimed at improving the over-all memory function of the head injured by tackling as many of the proposed modes of disturbance as practicable. The program was orientated towards improving memory efficiency, so that a patient might remember important things better.

The major exercise involved in the program was the construction of a personal hierarchy of items that
need to be remembered for the head injured patient
to cope successfully with his everyday contacts with
people. This exercise emphasised the development of
active mental processes to reinstate memory function
and relied on current knowledge of the limits of human
information processing. A good understanding of memory
function at both cognitive and behavioral levels was
developed.

Guidance on how to use the hierarchy was an
integral part of the program and practical exercises
to familiarise the patients with the use of the
hierarchy were incorporated. Follow-up reappraisal of
any difficulties in using the new memory system was
seen as essential also.

Clinical use of the program with head injured
patients on an individual basis and with a group of
temporal lobe epileptics has shown promising results
despite the difficulties involved in assessment of the
program's effectiveness. Provision of the program
material in a form demanding minimal preparation on the
clinician's part should make the program viable for
widespread use.
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STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION

The program presented in this essay represents my own ideas and development.

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