

Essential Oils Impact on the Resiliency of Ambulatory Clinic Staff

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Author Note

The author obtained permission and paid a \$25 fee to utilize the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (10-item) (CD-RISC©-10) tool.

Executive Summary

This DNP project highlighted the positive impact of essential oils on the resiliency of ambulatory clinic staff. Key findings from this project include:

- The use of inhaled essential oils was associated with improved staff resilience.
- Individual essential oil inhalers have minimal workflow disruption.
- This is a simple, easily replicated, cost-effective intervention well-suited to healthcare settings.

Background and Purpose

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of our healthcare teams and the challenges they face (Sexton et al., 2022). Staff health is foundational for safe patient care (Bachynsky, 2019). One key aspect of health is resilience, which enables individuals to respond positively to adverse circumstances (Cooper et al., 2020). Creating supportive and nurturing work environments is not just a suggestion but a necessity for improving staff health and resilience. A critical but often overlooked component of our healthcare delivery system occurs outside hospitals, in primary care and ambulatory settings. The staff providing care in ambulatory clinics see high volumes of medically complex patients. They must develop specialized skills for working in these areas (American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nursing [AAACN], 2023).

Studies have shown that essential oils improve staff stress (Reynolds et al., 2021). Inhaled essential oils enter through the nose to the brain and work directly on the limbic system, the emotional center of our brains (Buckle, 2014). This project aimed to use individual essential oil inhalers to improve the resiliency of ambulatory clinic staff.

Methodology

A pre-post-intervention design with a convenience sample of ambulatory clinic staff was used for this project. The clinics of a large tertiary care academic center served as the project site. The 12-week project involved the staff of three clinics and included licensed nurses, unlicensed personnel, administrative staff, nurse leaders, dental staff, and advanced practice providers. Fifty-eight staff began the project, and 33 completed the final survey.

Handheld inhalers were used to administer essential oils. Staff selected one of three options and created an individual container that could be used at work or home. Staff were educated on essential oils and the importance of taking a deep breath when using the inhalers. Clinic rounding and check-in surveys elicited participant feedback.

Staff resilience was measured at the beginning and conclusion of the project using the 10-item Connor Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC©-10). This validated tool for measuring the ability to rebound from demanding conditions and evaluating staff resilience employs a Likert scale with options ranging from zero to four (Davidson, 2023). An individual's score is obtained by adding the numeric values of the ten statements. The total score ranges from zero to 40, and greater resiliency is associated with higher scores.

Results from the CD-RISC© were analyzed for median, mode, and standard deviation and compared pre- and post-implementation. Values for each question and individual responses were evaluated. The percentage change from pre-implementation to post-implementation was calculated.

Results

Most participants reported using their inhalers one to three times daily and planned to continue using them following the project's conclusion. The post-project resilience scores

improved in all ten areas assessed by the CD-RISC©. The percentage of change ranged from 6.3% to 27.3%. Individual participant feedback was positive and reflected surprise at the benefit of inhaler use.

Strengths and Limitations

One of the strengths of this project was the simplicity of using individual aromatherapy inhalers. The enthusiasm of the leaders and staff created a positive environment for the project's success. Scannable quick response (QR) codes were used to distribute the CD-RISC© and check-in surveys, providing staff with easy survey access. The 10-item CD-RISC© was simple for staff to use and did not require a long response time. This project was seamlessly incorporated into clinic activities and did not disrupt workflow.

Limitations of this project include a small sample size and lack of randomization of subjects for the intervention. Additionally, pre-and post-implementation scores were not paired; therefore, changes in resilience scores for each participant are unknown. Conclusions for the project are based on the overall improvement in scores and not on individual results.

While bias for the project was minimized, staff may have enrolled in the project based on the encouragement of others and the excitement of using an inhaler rather than due to a desire to participate. This may have impacted the project's completion rate and contributed to attrition. Additionally, some staff may have chosen not to participate based on a lack of knowledge or dislike of essential oils.

Implications

The simplicity of this project lends itself to expansion across healthcare work settings and staff. The cost for supplies for the three clinics was approximately \$100, making this a cost-effective tool for encouraging staff well-being. This project is ideal for staff-led initiatives to

improve workplace stress and promote the development of positive environments to nurture others. Essential oil training is helpful for organizations looking to incorporate similar initiatives into their workplaces. Outcomes for assessing the benefits of essential oils include staff turnover and patient satisfaction.

Conclusions

The high-stress environments of healthcare work necessitate the incorporation of strategies to reduce stress and improve staff resilience. One such strategy is the use of inhaled essential oils. This simple, easily replicated, cost-effective intervention is well-suited to various healthcare settings with minimal workplace disruption to workflow and others. Organizations and leaders searching for innovative ideas for improving staff well-being and engaging them in the workplace may find essential oils an ideal launching point for prioritizing self-care.

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