Participation in meaningful activity is a significant part of recovery for people with serious mental illness. However, research consistently shows that this aspect of recovery is not being achieved. And yet, there are few if any tools which service providers can use to support consumer/survivors to address this issue.

In response, a group of occupational therapists from Queen’s University and the Kingston community have developed a new “occupational time use intervention.” Called Action over Inertia (Krupa, Edgelow, Chen, Mieras, Perry, Radloff-Gabriel, Almas, Jackson & Bransfield, 2007), the intervention is designed to assist people with serious mental illness to increase the amount of time they devote to meaningful pursuits. Ultimately, the goal is to increase a consumer/survivors’ sense of well-being and health.

The intervention was recently pilot-tested with 18 clients by a group of occupational therapists over a 12-week trial period. The pilot-test included a “treatment group,” participants who used the Action over Inertia intervention, and, as comparison, a “control group,” people who did not use the intervention but were included as part of the overall process.

Initial results are promising: participants who used the intervention found that they slept less, and by the end of the trial, were engaged, on average, in 47 minutes more activity every day. In contrast, participants in the “control group” increased their daily average sleep by 22 minutes over the same 12-week period. While results from the two groups did not differ in other ways, feedback on the intervention was overwhelmingly positive, from service providers, therapists and treatment participants.

Participant comments include: “I am happier being productive and useful” and, “I learned to exercise in my spare time; it made me think about how I spend my time.” Others stated, “I feel better, I feel satisfied that I’m not sitting on the sofa all day watching TV” and, “The treatment helped me realize my human potential.”

Laid out in workbook format, the intervention is divided into two parts:

- The first encourages clients to reflect on their current activity levels and patterns.
- The second supports clients in setting and reaching goals to improve their levels of activity, and to achieve a balance between different kinds of activity.
Consumer/ survivors, with the assistance of an occupational therapist, work through five stages in the workbook: (1) preparation, (2) reflection, (3) education, (4) planning, and (5) action and evaluation. Most sections include a variety of information and worksheets, which allow service providers to tailor content to client need, and so that consumer/ survivors can use their own goals and values to guide the process. In follow-up to the promising pilot-test results, the Kingston occupational therapy group plans to publish Action over Inertia so that mental health professionals can begin using the intervention. Over the long-term, the group also intends to study the Action over Inertia intervention on a larger scale, and possibly with a lengthier treatment timeline than 12 weeks.

For more information about the intervention and to obtain further detailed pilot-test results, please contact Megan Edgelow at: 5mme@queensu.ca. Edgelow recently completed her M.Sc. in Rehabilitation Science at Queen’s University. Pilot testing the Action over Inertia intervention formed part of her Master’s thesis.

Technical Overview of the Project:

The pilot-test was a prospective, multi-centre randomized controlled trial, involving five Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams in southeastern Ontario. The 12-week trials ran from September 2007 to May 2008, and involved a total of 18 ACT clients recruited specifically for the pilot-test.

Action over Inertia is based on occupational therapy theory about activity, and also uses other techniques effective in the mental health care field: psychoeducation, behavioral activation and supported activity engagement.