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# Attention Restorative Theory and its potential use in fatigue management

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## Background

Fatigue is a common and distressing symptom of long term illness, palliative care conditions and cancer. Attention Restorative Theory (ART) was developed by Kaplan (2001) following his interest in restoring mental attention within the 'person-environment interaction'. Within this framework, restorative activities have aspects of 'being away' (i.e. distinct from routine), 'fascination', 'extent' (i.e. scope) and 'compatibility'.

## Aims

- To identify activities enjoyed by fatigue sufferers.
- To determine core attributes of activities that could be used to restore mental attention.

## Method

An ethnographic approach was used to address the study aims. Semi-structured interviews lasting no more 45 minutes were conducted using an interview guide, where the emphasis was on describing and exploring activities that were enjoyable rather than dwelling on the limitations of fatigue.

## Results

Categories of activities: artistic pursuits, games, contributing to the community, physical leisure, home leisure, going out and developing interests. Examples included: a full range of creative arts, baking, reading (various forms), watching motor bike racing, singing, gardening, community involvement and having a facial.

### Linked attributes:

Safety, social interaction, achievement and novelty

### Thematic aspects:

Social coherence (sense of belonging), Opportunities for Creativity and Learning (expansive), Effortless and Nurturing (restorative), Purposeful (compatible with view of self, self efficacy) and Fascinating (beauty, entertaining).

## Sample

The sample consisted of 25 people from a hospice, podiatry clinic and service user group aged 42-80 years, distressed by fatigue as a result of a long term illness, a palliative care condition or cancer.

## Conclusions

The ART approach may be relevant to easing fatigue through encouraging 'attention restorative activities' in diverse populations. The themes identified in this pilot study loosely matched properties postulated by Kaplan (2001), but with some prominence given to social and purposeful attributes. This slight difference observed in this sample may be significant in some way. Further research is needed to explore and test potential practice based interventions.

## Reference:

Kaplan, S. (2001) Mediation, Restoration and the Management of Mental Fatigue. *Environment and Behaviour*, 33:480-506.

