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A TARGETED REMEDIATION APPROACH: THE TRAINING OF AFFECT RECOGNITION (TAR)

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Introduction: An increasing number of studies is focusing on general deficits in patients with schizophrenia in identifying, differentiating and recalling facial emotions which significantly impairs the patient's psychosocial functioning and quality of life.

Objectives: These impairments seem not to be affected by conventional treatment. According to preliminary results antipsychotics alone show only little effects on social cognition.

Aims: The present study investigated the efficacy of a computer based training focussing on facial affect recognition (Training of Affect recognition TAR, Wölwer et al. 2005) for the remediation of social cognitive dysfunctions.

Methods: Effects on social cognition were tested with the Vienna Emotion Recognition Task (VERT-K, Pawelak 2004). Neurocognitive performance was assessed by the Wisconsin Card Sorting Test (WCST Heaton et al. 1993). Additional assessments were tests of alertness, vigilance and working memory (TAP Zimmermann and Fimm 2002), positive and negative symptoms (PANSS Kay et al. 1987), Beck Depression Scale (BDI Beck 1964) and Quality of Life (WHOQOL-Bref WHOQOL Group 1998).

Results: In comparison to the TAU group, the TAR group achieved significant improvements in affect recognition in general as well as in recognizing sad faces ($p < 0.01$) (Fig.2). In addition, we found significant improvements for the TAR group in regard to vigilance and Quality of Life ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusions: Treatment with new antipsychotics alone leads only to limited effects on social cognition and functioning. A specific combined treatment of new antipsychotics and TAR leads to improved cognition and emotional performance with additional positive effects on functional outcome.