

Multi-Sensory Environments (MSE) in dementia care: the role of design

Keywords: dementia, multi sensory experience and environment, inclusive design, evidenced-based design, health care environment

Interdisciplinary research has evolved from a broad consideration in respect to the rising number of people with dementia, rapid growth of an ageing population, over-prescribed use of antipsychotic medication and the need for cost-effective interventions supporting dementia care. Within this context this research aims to explore the quality of multi-sensory stimulation offered in homes for residents living with dementia, focusing on Multi-Sensory Environments (MSEs) in particular, and whether design can improve such experiences and maximise therapeutic benefits.



Figure 1:
Example of MSE in
dementia care

MSEs are widely used in dementia care as a meaningful leisure activity and a therapeutic intervention. However, evidence suggests that they often fail to address the specific needs of people with dementia due to inadequate design and poor facilitation (Cruz et al., 2011; Dalke et al., 2011). Also, little research

has considered the impact of MSE design on engagement and well-being (Collier et al., 2010; Anderson et al., 2011).

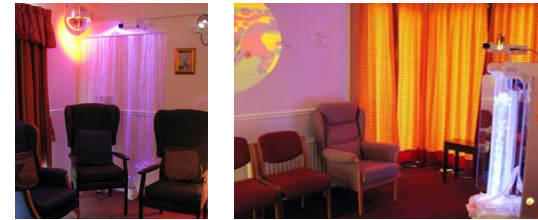


Figure 2: Examples of existing MSE facilities

This study investigates the aesthetic and functional qualities of MSE currently provided such as material/colour/imagery applied, spatial set-up, usability, accessibility, with the aim to establish reasons for success and failure. Fifteen

care-homes with MSE will be visited to record how they use MSEs. Data will be collected using ethnographic methods incorporating structured interviews with care staff familiar with the MSE and observations of residents and carers. All residents with dementia who currently use the MSE will be invited to participate. Data will be analysed using thematic and content analysis. The results will inform the design development of MSE for people with dementia and how benefits for residents and their carers can be maximised through improved design providing a person-centred experience.

The paper presents preliminary findings and methods from this research project, a collaboration between researchers from design and occupational therapy, funded by AHRC and supported by Care UK.
<http://fada.kingston.ac.uk/de/projects/>

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