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Can a multi-sensory product enhance quality of life for people living with dementia and be used as a tool in the evaluation of an individual's needs? completion?

Keywords: dementia, design, emotion, graphic design, haptic, textile, touch, tactile, movement, sensory, interaction, wellbeing

The purpose of this study was to identify ways in which design could enhance quality of life for people with dementia. Using inclusive design principles our project aims to develop an innovative multisensory product (Fidget Widget) that can help sustain experiences of personhood, positive moments of interaction with carers, reduce agitation and restlessness, and encourage positive, physical activity by people living with dementia. The product is also proposed as a resource in the management of dementia symptoms, for use as an education/training tool, and to assess quality of life, an area that is lacking in accurate indicators (Warner, Milne and Peet, 2012).

Currently, many therapeutic sensory objects and materials used in dementia care have been adapted from other uses and contexts, often made for children, which can cause confusion and distress for patients and carers. It is our objective that Fidget Widgets will be neither childlike nor medical in their aesthetic.

A qualitative approach was used, starting with a collection of information (literature review) and objects (Sensory Store). The literature review evidenced the value of multi-sensory stimulation in the care of people living with dementia (Kitwood, 1997), and that positive relationships and social interaction are also important in the reinforcing of personhood for people living with dementia (Hammer and Orrell, 2008). The Sensory Store is being used in a series of participatory workshops in order that the researchers can observe sensory responses and gather verbal descriptions of the haptic experiences stimulated.

At present the Store is housed in the Alzheimer's Society, Central Lancashire for the benefit of carers and people living with dementia. Our paper will reflect on

findings to date and present initial design proposals for the next stage of the development process Fidget Widget.

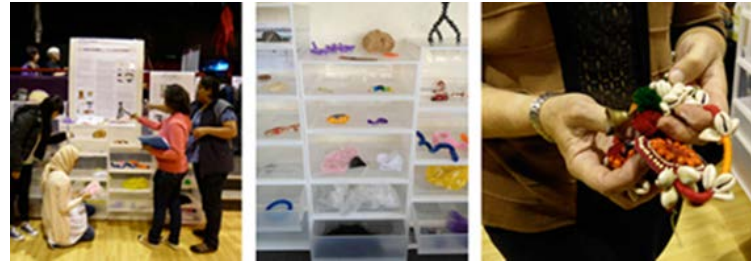


Figure 1 Sensory Store exhibit, World Mental Health Day, University of Central Lancashire, 10 October 2012.

References

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