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Understanding Factors Affecting Optimal Nutrition and Hydration for People Living in Specialised Dementia Care Units: A Qualitative Study of Caregivers’ Perceptions

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics

at Massey University, Albany
New Zealand.

Debra Nell
2013
Abstract

Background: Worldwide, 35.6 million people have dementia. The current aging world population means prevalence of dementia is expected to almost double every 20 years. Weight loss, undernutrition and dehydration are common in people with dementia especially among those who reside in specialised dementia care units (SDCUs). There are currently no foodservice guidelines specifically for SDCUs in New Zealand.

Aim: To understand factors affecting optimal nutrition and hydration for individuals living in SDCUs. Objectives: To explore the perceptions of caregivers regarding factors influencing intake of food and fluids, and to provide a range of potential recommendations for foodservice providers.

Methods: Qualitative descriptive study, using semi-structured interviews with 11 caregivers at 2 SDCUs. Data were analysed using a general inductive approach.

Findings: Environmental factors (relating to the surroundings of the dining environment, the social aspects to dining, and the need for and provision of support with mealtime activities), and individual factors (appetite, food appeal, and cognitive and functional abilities) affect food and fluid intake in people with dementia living in SDCUs.

Conclusion: Factors affecting the nutrition and hydration status of people living in SDCUs are complex and inter-related. Organisations providing specialised dementia care, their staff, and foodservice providers can take a number of steps to ensure optimal nutrition and hydration for the people they care for.
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# Table of contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ ii
Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. iii
List of Tables .......................................................................................................................... vii
List of Figures ......................................................................................................................... vii
Abbreviations ........................................................................................................................... vii

1.0 Introduction........................................................................................................................ 1
  1.1 Researcher’s Interest ........................................................................................................ 2
  1.2 Background and Justification for the Research ............................................................. 4
  1.3 Research Aim and Objectives ....................................................................................... 7
  1.4 Structure of the Thesis ................................................................................................. 8
  1.5 Summary ....................................................................................................................... 9

2.0 Literature Review .............................................................................................................. 11
  2.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 11
  2.2 Background to Dementia and Nutritional Issues for People with Dementia .......... 12
    2.2.1 What is dementia? .................................................................................................. 12
    2.2.2 Prevalence and incidence of dementia ................................................................ 13
    2.2.3 Residential care for people with dementia ......................................................... 15
    2.2.4 Foodservice in ARRC facilities including SDCUs ............................................. 15
    2.2.5 Dementia - dietary intake and nutritional status .............................................. 16
  2.3 Dementia and Eating .................................................................................................... 19
    2.3.1 Introduction ......................................................................................................... 19
    2.3.2 Changes to eating as dementia progresses ....................................................... 20
    2.3.3 Models relating to mealtime difficulties ......................................................... 22
    2.3.4 Factors affecting nutritional status of people with dementia ............................ 25
    2.3.5 Person-centred care ......................................................................................... 26
    2.3.6 Individual .......................................................................................................... 27
    2.3.7 Social ................................................................................................................ 35
    2.3.8 Cultural ............................................................................................................. 39
    2.3.9 Physical environment ..................................................................................... 42
    2.3.10 Assistance ....................................................................................................... 45
  2.4 Summary – What the Literature Tells Us ................................................................. 47
  2.5 Limitations of this Literature Review ...................................................................... 48

3.0 Research Design ............................................................................................................... 50
  3.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 50
  3.2 Methodology and Rationale – A background to the Study Design ............................ 50
    3.2.1 A qualitative approach .................................................................................... 50
    3.2.2 Qualitative descriptive methodology ............................................................ 51
List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>The coding process in inductive analysis</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Themes and example extracts</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Model of feeding difficulty</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Model of mealtime difficulty</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Key themes from the literature affecting nutrition and hydration status of people living in SDCUs</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Factors affecting nutrition and hydration status of people living in SDCUs</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARRC</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDCU</td>
<td>Specialised dementia care unit</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
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<td>AD</td>
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<td>Clinical Dementia Rating scale</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>