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Original Study

Green Care Farms as Innovative Nursing Homes, Promoting Activities and Social Interaction for People With Dementia



Bram de Boer MSc^{a,*}, Jan P.H. Hamers PhD, RN^a, Sandra M.G. Zwakhalen PhD, RN^a, Frans E.S. Tan PhD^b, Hanneke C. Beerens PhD, RN^a, Hilde Verbeek PhD^a

^a Department of Health Services Research, Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences, CAPHRI School for Public Health and Primary Care, Maastricht University, Maastricht, The Netherlands

^b Department of Methodology and Statistics, Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences, CAPHRI School for Public Health and Primary Care, Maastricht University, Maastricht, The Netherlands

A B S T R A C T

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Objectives: Innovative care environments are developed for people with dementia to encourage person-centered care. This study aims to investigate whether residents of green care farms that provide 24-hour nursing care participate more in (physical) activities and social interaction compared with residents of other nursing homes.

Design: Longitudinal observation study.

Setting: Nursing homes in the Netherlands (green care farms, traditional nursing homes, and regular small-scale living facilities).

Participants: A total of 115 nursing home residents at baseline, 100 at follow-up.

Measurements: Ecological momentary assessments ($n = 16,860$) were conducted using the Maastricht Electronic Daily Life Observation Tool. Residents living at green care farms were compared with residents living in traditional nursing homes and regular small-scale living facilities. The following aspects were collected for this study: the activity performed by the participant or occurring in his or her vicinity, the engagement in the activity, the level of physical activity during the activity, the physical environment (location where the activity occurred), and the level of social interaction during the activity.

Results: In total, 9660 baseline observations and 7200 follow-up observations were conducted. Analyses showed that residents of green care farms significantly more often participated in domestic activities ($P = .004$, $SE = 1.6$) and outdoor/nature-related activities ($P = .003$, $SE = 0.9$), and significantly less often engaged in passive/purposeless activities ($P < .001$, $SE = 1.7$) compared with residents of traditional nursing homes. Furthermore, residents of green care farms had significantly more active engagement ($P = .014$, $SE = 0.9$), more social interaction ($P = .006$, $SE = 1.1$), and came outside significantly more ($P = .010$, $SE = 1.1$) than residents of traditional nursing homes. Residents of green care farms were significantly more physically active ($P = .013$, $SE = 0.8$) than were residents of regular small-scale living facilities. No other significant differences were found.

Conclusion: Green care farms can be a valuable alternative to traditional nursing homes. They provide an attractive, homelike environment and activities that positively influence engagement and social interaction. Research is needed to study how successful elements of green care farms can be implemented in existing nursing homes.

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* Address correspondence to Bram de Boer, MSc, Maastricht University, Duboisdomein 30, Maastricht 6229 GT, The Netherlands.

E-mail address: b.deboer@maastrichtuniversity.nl (B. de Boer).

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Green care farms that provide 24-hour nursing care for people with dementia are a new phenomenon within the geriatric landscape in the Netherlands. The development is part of a larger worldwide movement toward small-scale, homelike care environments that aim to provide person-centered care.^{1,2}

This radical redesign is believed to be necessary to solve the ongoing struggle in nursing homes against passivity and related negative outcomes, such as boredom, loneliness, isolation, and social

exclusion.^{3,4} Residents in traditional nursing homes spend a substantial part of their days doing little or nothing while remaining in a lying or sitting position, without social interaction, and they are rarely engaged in meaningful activities.^{5–7}

To tackle these problems, various alternative facilities are developing across the world.⁸ Examples are small-scale living facilities on the terrain of larger nursing homes, stand-alone units in the neighborhood, and recently, green care farms that provide 24-hour nursing care for people with dementia.⁹ Traditional institutional care settings are being redesigned into smaller group homes that provide a more homelike and familiar atmosphere for people with dementia.¹⁰ These new facilities are aimed at allowing people to continue the life they had before admission for as long as possible and reaching or maintaining a good quality of life.¹¹ They try to achieve this by focusing on engaging residents in activities, giving them feelings of meaning in life, and allowing them to express themselves and interact with other people. A recent review on the impact of homelike residential care

models showed that the current evidence on the effectiveness of these models is limited and that more comparative research is needed to provide a stronger evidence base to justify the uptake of more homelike residential care models, such as green care farms.¹²

Green care farms combine agricultural with care activities and are a new type of small-scale living facility (Figure 1 and <https://www.academischewerkplaatsouderenzorg.nl/node/10802>).¹³ Within day care, green care farms are a widely adopted way of providing care for different client groups. Norway, the Netherlands, and France are the leading countries with each approximately 1000 green care farms providing day care.¹⁴ It is suggested that nursing staff require explicit competencies for working in these new small-scale facilities because of the integrated tasks they have.^{15,16} The rationale of green care farms is that people should be able to participate in daily activities as much as possible. Furthermore, the physical environment offers many opportunities to incorporate these activities into normal daily care practices and offers residents to move more freely than in existing



Fig. 1. Impression of green care farms.

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