

Social psychology

How to improve the appropriation of space and the morale of residents in nursing homes

Comment améliorer l'appropriation de l'espace et le moral des résidents en maison de retraite

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Abstract

This study proposes a simple methodology to improve the quality of life of residents in nursing homes. In the experimental condition, an intervention based on the feeling of control, the technique of touching and “you are free to. . .” was implemented. Assessment of the residents’ appropriation of their personal space and their morale was made one month later. Data showed a significant improvement in both parameters in the experimental condition, whereas values remained stable in the control group, which did not receive the intervention.

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Keywords: Institutionalized elderly; Feeling of control; Touching; Evoking freedom; Appropriation of space; Morale

Résumé

Cette étude propose une méthodologie simple ayant pour objectif d’améliorer la qualité de vie de résidents en maison de retraite. Dans une condition expérimentale, une intervention basée sur le sentiment de contrôle, la technique du toucher et du « vous êtes libre de. . . » a été mise en œuvre. Des mesures de l’appropriation de l’espace et du moral des résidents ont été effectuées à un mois d’intervalle. Sur cette période, les résultats ont révélé une amélioration significative de l’appropriation de l’espace et du moral des résidents dans la

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condition expérimentale, alors que dans la condition contrôle n'ayant bénéficié d'aucune intervention, les mesures sont restées stables.

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Mots clés : Personnes âgées ; Sentiment de contrôle ; Technique du toucher ; Technique du « vous êtes libre de... » ; Appropriation de l'espace ; Moral

Placement in a nursing home is frequently seen more as a constraint resulting from a family or legal request than as a deliberate decision by the elderly person directly concerned (Villegz, 2002; Pellisier, 2003). Entering an institution is thus perceived as an event that goes against the expression of an individual's autonomy. Residents in nursing homes feel obliged to abandon their decisional independence and have to adapt to a completely new world from one day to the next. Their new environment, which is itself governed by binding rules that reduce their scope of action, has a direct impact on the way they interact with their surroundings. For example, Faure and Osiurak (2013) observed that the less elderly people living in institution-appropriated space, the worst was their quality of life. These changes can have serious consequences, particularly in terms of quality of life. However, owing to the increase in life expectancy over the coming years, issues concerning the quality of life of residents in nursing homes are likely to generate major social problems.

Since the 1970s, a series of studies has been conducted to assess the effects of residents' feeling of control over their health and psychological state. For example, allowing nursing home residents to have control over their environment by having to look after a plant was found to have a positive impact on their health (Langer & Rodin, 1976; Rodin & Langer, 1977). Conversely, other studies have shown that loss of control may have deleterious effects on residents' health and psychological state (Schulz, 1976; Schulz & Hanusa, 1978). For example, Schulz and Hanusa (1978) randomly assigned residents in nursing homes to four different conditions. In the first, they were visited by students and could control the frequency and duration of visits (enhanced control condition). In the second, they were informed of the visit and its duration (predict condition). In the third, they received visits randomly (random condition). Finally, in the fourth, which was the control group, the residents did not receive any visits (no treatment condition). In agreement with the authors' hypothesis, an improvement in the health and psychological state of the subjects was observed in the groups that had the most control (control condition and predict enhanced condition) compared to the other two groups. However, Schulz and Hanusa reassessed their health and psychological state two years, two and a half years and four years after the experiment. The results showed that while the groups "random condition" and "no treatment condition" remained relatively stable, the others underwent a significant decrease in their dynamism, which became lower than that of other two groups. Thus, the act of creating a feeling of control in patients and its subsequent removal generated negative effects and a serious ethical problem.

Recent work aiming to improve the living conditions of residents in French retirement homes has focused on the use of compliance without pressure paradigms. These paradigms include a set of techniques to get others to perform behaviors that they would not spontaneously undertake (Joule & Beauvois, 1998, 2002). It is through these procedures that individuals submit to diverse types of requests while believing that they have acted out of their own free will, thus, the term compliance without pressure. In this way, it has been possible to get residents to participate in social activities (Halimi-Falkowicz, Quaderi & Joule, 2007; Marchand, Halimi-Falkowicz & Joule, 2009). In fact,

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