“MEmories”: A Grounded Theory Study on the Use of Reminiscence to Build Relationships with People with Dementia

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Context

• It is estimated that between 30-50% of all people with significant dementia live in long-term care (Hebert et al. 2001, Macdonald & Cooper 2007, Alzheimer’s Association 2012).

• Approximately 30-40% of those living in long-term care have moderate to severe cognitive impairment (Macdonald et al. 2002, Galik 2010, Alzheimer’s Association, 2012).

• Limited understanding of the subjective experience of living with moderate to severe dementia in long-term care settings (Clare et al. 2008, Edwardsson & Nordwall 2008).
Reminiscence

- Reminiscence focuses on supporting people to think or talk about past events, experiences or activities (Woods et al. 2005, Cotelli et al. 2012).
- Although focused on the past, reminiscence allows the person to communicate and interact with the listener in the present (Gibson 2011 p.9).
- Drawing on preserved memories and preserved abilities (O’Shea et al., 2014; Woods et al., 2012).
- Although used extensively, relatively little is known about the effects of reminiscence for people with dementia (Woods et al. 2005, O’Shea et al. 2011) or staff (Gudex et al. 2010).
Study

• This embedded grounded theory study is part of the DARES trial designed to evaluate the effectiveness of a Structured Education Reminiscence-based Programme for Staff (SERPS) (Cooney et al., 2013) on the QoL of residents with dementia living in long-stay facilities in Ireland. A full account of the trial methods (O’Shea et al., 2011) and trial findings (O’Shea et al., 2014) are reported elsewhere.

• Plano Clark et al. (2013) describe the characteristics and associated challenges of embedding a qualitative study within a randomised controlled trial (RCT). These are grouped around: (i) separation of primary and secondary research questions (ii) the integrity and rigor of the RCT cannot be compromised and (iii) the relationship between the quantitative and qualitative data must be considered when designing data analysis.

• The grounded theory study was focused on four sites (Public n = 2, Private n = 2). Data was collected using interviews with residents with dementia (n = 11), relatives (n = 5), HCAs (n = 10), registered nurses (n = 9), nurse managers (n = 3).
The Theory of “Seeing Me”

The theory of “Seeing ME (through my MEMories)” explains that through reminiscing with the person with dementia, learning their stories, listening to their memories, the person (ME) was revealed to staff in unexpected ways. Staff also perceived that resident participants saw them as individuals and engaged with them differently than beforehand. Knowing who the person was (their past) helped staff at its most basic to understand what matters to them (in the present). However at a more fundamental level “Seeing ME” helped staff to relate to and connect to the person (and vice versa) in new ways. Three interrelated categories “seeing and knowing the person”, “reminiscence ... a key” and “understanding and accommodation”
“(Bit by bit we built up her life story and I was surprised) by her sense of devilment … her character when she was growing up … you don’t see that when somebody is eighty-something, but the stories she used to be telling me, I enjoyed it. I was enjoying it with her and she was as well. It was good … they come alive when they’re talking about it.” (N194)

“I would liken it to sort of tuning a radio in … there’s times when I can just sort of get into the right wavelength … So, I think anything that can kind of help do that tuning would be fantastic and there are certain things in my mother’s case, it’s more a case of conversation about the past and music and that sort of thing, it seems to really (engage her) … I can only be at the nursing home for limited periods of time during the week … we would love to think that other people were, you know, taking up the baton and helping as well.” (R03)

I think they do (try to get to know you). Some of them anyway. They might ask you questions. Maybe about yourself or your family. They don't have a lot of time, I think.

No. And have you noticed recently that they're asking you more about yourself or about your family?

Not too long ago they did ask me, yes and I thought I wonder why she's so interested. Yeah.

And was that nice?

It was lovely but like that, there were nine of us as children and good parents. They're all gone only myself.

Right. And is it okay? Do you think it's okay to talk about those kind of things?

Oh, it is

It's not upsetting?

Oh no, they listen. They would listen to you if you wanted to tell them anything. I know that. They would. I've no complaints about them. They're very, very good because I always say they have a lot to do. I often said it to somebody. They're not walking past, they're running. (P041)
Seeing & Knowing the Person

Not a one-way process ... residents responded and engaged with staff.

“... they're more inclined to sort of chat to me more ... if I mention something they'll get involved in the conversation. [Name] is very shy ... but now if I actually sit down and mention anything about anything, she will now come forward. I think she's more comfortable with me now maybe ... I don't know, but she's different. She's definitely a lot chattier.” (H012)

“I got to know them (assigned residents with dementia) all really, really well ... and our relationship was much, much stronger and I could get through to [Name] ... She used to fight an awful lot with this other client ... I could get through to her an awful lot quicker because we had that special bond because we had sat and talked about her loved ones.” (N013)

They never asked me about that. Just say, did you go dancing? You know, they never ... Of course when I started, you see, I would be laughing away and I'd be telling them this. I'd say to them what in God's name am I after doing boring the hell out of them people, but I used to feel good then.

**Do you think it bores them?**

No, I don't think so.

**How does it make you feel to know that they're interested in you?**

I feel happy. I feel as though I'm... I always, you see I was always tall and very skinny and I'd a big nose. It's still there and you know, I was always conscious of that nose. (P342)

Inevitably residents ability to engage was mediated by the stage of their dementia, comorbidities and personal preferences. Similarly what staff valued and viewed as important impacted on their engagement with reminiscence.
Reminiscence “... a key”

Unlocked the person’s past but also enabled staff to engage with the PWD in a different way and vice versa.

“We were buttering bread and his mum used to make butter, so we were talking about how he used to make the butter and milking the cows ... I suppose it makes me feel that I’m connecting with him on a level he remembers, that is specific to him. That it’s not just general chit-chat ... but it’s actually important to him because it’s something he can relate to ...” (N192)

“I brought in (a) book and there was a factory (there) and (Resident) worked there and she was in the sewing room and she made bags and that seems to be quite a fond memory for her ... She loved us to go back ... and see where she worked (through photographs in the book) ... the next day when I went in and I wasn't going to do reminiscence that day, she said ‘remember that thing you done - the pictures? Can we do that again?’” (N171)
Understanding & Accommodating

Understanding the person’s past sometimes helped staff to interpret “understand & accommodate” the person’s behaviour in the present.

“He used to just wander the corridors and it was only afterwards when we started doing this (reminiscence) that we asked him and he was putting sheep in the pen ... He used to take all the fire extinguishers and he'd put them all in the corner and we said, ‘what in God's name ...’ but he was actually making a pen for the sheep and this was what he was doing ...
And was that something that perhaps you tried to stop him doing before? Yeah, you'd be saying for ‘God's sake,’ would you ever nail them on? Whereas now, I find, I let them do it.” (H011)

“... one of my residents (has a) very, very erratic personality and very hard to calm down when she's irate. I've noticed a huge difference in her when you speak to her and you tell her things she wants to hear, she gets wrapped up in this conversation and it really helps. (later in the interview) ... she has times of anxiousness and is erratic and it (reminiscence) calms her down unbelievably so, when you speak about something that's familiar to her ... and she sees actually I know her and that is a big thing for her. ... (I have learnt) she's not just a confused resident. She has had a life.”” (N174)
Increased interaction with the person with dementia through life story work and reminiscence enables staff to "see and know" the person beneath the dementia. In turn residents begin to "see and know" the individual staff member (i.e. reciprocity).

Reminiscence acts as a "... a key" unlocking the person's past and facilitating interaction with the person with dementia in the present.

"Knowing the person" increases staff's empathy and "understanding" of the person's behaviour and willingness to "accommodate" this behaviour and/or manage it better. "Accommodating" behaviour supports a calmer environment and has a positive effect for the individual resident, other residents and staff.

Factors mediating engagement (resident and staff) with and sustainability of reminiscence are: individual to the person with dementia's (his/her response, preferences, level of cognitive impairment and comorbidities, individual to the staff member (interest, motivation, knowledge, skills, confidence and persistence) and the
Comments

Staff surprised at the capacity of PWD to communicate and interact.

Opportunity to fundamentally change the lives of PWD.

Shift in organisational culture

Lets leave the last word ...
Do you like to see pictures or hear stories about when you were younger?

Yes, somebody gave me an album here with some bit of photos in it, but I left it back home. Sent it back home. It’s at home where it is.

Is that the kind of thing you’d like people to sit down and show you?

Just what I know is in it. The church and things like that, the shops, but [name] I don’t know that gave me that little present.

Would that be a good thing to sit down with, if that had pictures of where you were brought up and things like that, would that be interesting to you?

Yes, it would be. Yes. They gave me that little present, the pictures of the village although I know them, it’s nice to have them in the book. (P484)
References


