

Time to change the dementia stereotype?



The word most commonly associated with dementia is sufferer yet some people with dementia are living meaningful lives. What's going on?

THE DEMENTIA STEREOTYPE

We have all seen pictures like this in the media - an older person staring vacantly into middle distance with a look of despair, utterly lost in a sea of confusion and loneliness. The words "dementia" and "sufferer" seem inseparable and we feel that suffering is the very essence of dementia.

And yet some people with dementia are living fulfilling lives with regular and deeply meaningful moments of pleasure and happiness. Even just a few years ago such a possibility seemed like heresy. Today our understanding is very different from the dementia stereotype that still prevails.

IT STARTS WITH GOOD DESIGN

Good dementia care starts with a homely environment which is easy to understand and navigate. This helps people to use spaces as independently as possible.

Good dementia design is still evolving and the Dementia Centre at Stirling University does great work in documenting best practice in dementia design. Our own experiences

have confirmed the extraordinary difference that good design makes to people's well-being.

PEOPLE NEED PEOPLE

We are social animals and people with dementia need others around them who support them to remain as independent and active as possible and who help them through their challenges. As people progress through their dementia so the nature and frequency of support changes. While part-time support may suffice in the early stage, at some stage this involves the round the clock presence of others. Good social support is easy to define but harder to achieve - it is simply where people with dementia feel safe and loved

MAGICAL MOMENTS

A curious thing happens when we live in the moment. Confusion drops away and we forget about the past and the future. This is where the magic happens - a moment of clarity, a moment of creativity, a moment of pleasure, a moment of happiness, a moment of meaning. We are all different and for

some of us this happens when we sing in a group, for others it's a walk by the seaside, knitting a scarf for a friend, sharing a meal with family, painting a picture of great beauty. For many of us it is simply knowing that we are not alone but part of a loving community. Creating such magical moments is the very essence of good dementia care.

THE END OF SUFFERING?

Who of us can honestly say we don't suffer? Suffering is as much part of life as happiness. The truth is that we cannot abolish the suffering that is life. We can however abolish the suffering that comes from inadequate care. And in a civilised society we simply must.

Yes we are different! - Come and see for yourself. We'll put the kettle on... ♦

Peter de Groot is a principal at Dementia Care Devon which operates the Cottage and Lodge at Rose Lodge, two small communities for people living with Dementia.



Gold Award



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