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What do you see Nurse?
Dementia: Everybody's Business

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On the 12th June we were awarded the silver award for our entry to Health has got Talent, a showcase event for innovation and teaching within the School of Health Sciences. Our entry allowed us to share our vision to raise awareness of dementia care with the pre-registration nursing students as a key component of simulated practice.

Twenty percent of the population in the UK are over 60 and this number is expected to rise to 28% by 2030 (ONS, 2011). A large number of older people are concerned about being a burden within society (Independent Age 2014). If this concern becomes a reality, this will then have implications for health care delivery. Negative attitudes towards older people in healthcare may impact on the older person's experience and the quality of care they receive (Liu et al, 2012).

Within the older people population in the United Kingdom (UK) there are a growing number of people living with a diagnosis of dementia. In 2009 it was estimated that 700,000 people had dementia and the number is expected to double to 1.4 million by 2029 (DH, 2009). More recently, Alzheimer's Research UK (2011) estimated that the number of people in the UK living with dementia was closer to 820,000 people. The National Dementia Strategy makes it clear that dementia is an illness that cannot be ignored (DH, 2009). With this growing number of people with dementia it is vital that care providers have a better understanding of what it is like to live with dementia, from the perspective of a person with dementia. The concern about attitudes towards old age and dementia presents a unique challenge to healthcare and the education of the future nursing workforce.

The relationship between the nurse and the person with dementia is central to person-centred care and is crucial to the quality of care that people with dementia receive. Therefore, we set out to explore student's attitudes about people with dementia and to provide an opportunity to experience 'living with dementia' in simulated practice.

Simulated practice allows students to explore and experience clinical practice, enhance self-awareness and challenge attitudes within a real, but controlled environment. This learning context enables the students to reflect, evaluate their experience and develop a sense of purpose within the profession.

A dementia awareness workshop was developed in collaboration with Mental Health and Adult nursing. To challenge and explore the students' attitudes values and clarification activities were used and guided imagery was adopted to enable the students to develop a greater awareness and self-understanding of dementia, and the needs of the individual. An extract of one of the guided imageries is presented below to capture the essence of the workshop. Initially students were asked to close their eyes and explore their own sense of self.

'You don't feel you know this place but then again it seems sort of familiar. You have no idea how you got here, and don't know how to get home. You can't think where you left your car, and you have no keys, money or credit cards. Some people look familiar to you, but you can't remember their names. Your movements are clumsy, and the ability to complete the simplest of tasks eludes you. You have a pain but don't know why and can't explain where it is.

You're struggling to communicate with others around you. You find it difficult to explain what you want – sometimes you just can't find the words and at others you lose the thread of the conversation. You are trying to explain your situation to the people around you but they do not seem to understand you. People seem to be in a rush and you feel very alone.

Then someone comes towards you, they are friendly and warm. They refer to you by name, they must know you. They are talking about your husband or wife. You begin to feel safe, they know who you are and what is important to you. This special person takes your hand and you feel joy and cheerfulness inside. You help this person with the job in hand, you feel a sense of purpose, how wonderful it is to feel needed. '

Following these activities students are expected to explore their emotional responses to the situations they visualised.

What did the students learn?
Comments from the evaluations included:

'Developed my awareness of the challenges people face'
'The workshop really challenged my thoughts and ideas about people living with dementia',
'I thought I knew a lot about dementia but the workshop showed me how much more this is for me to learn'
'Enjoyed merging with other groups and learning from each other'.

Based on the student evaluations it is clear that shared learning between mental health and adult nursing is regarded positively and therefore, we aim to continue with this practice. The use of guided imagery is a new innovation to this workshop which will develop further to enhance the students' experience. It is anticipated that a more detailed evaluation will be undertaken to explore the impact of this workshop. To make learning more meaningful and create realism for the students we aim to involve people with dementia in the mild stage in the workshop through video or direct involvement.

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