

## **Commentary: Singing as a health-promoting activity in elderly care: a qualitative, longitudinal study in Norway**

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Accepted for publication in: *Journal of Research in Nursing*

DOI: 10.1177/1744987120918410

As the global population increases, so does the incidence of people living with dementia, which has an impact not only in financial terms but represents a substantial human cost to societies across the world (World Health Organization, 2017). The global estimate of dementia prevalence was 35.6 million in 2010 and is forecast to reach 115 million by 2050 (Livingston et al., 2017). The total number of people with dementia in the UK is predicted to be in excess of 1 million by 2021 (Smurthwaite, 2019).

People living with dementia in a nursing care setting may have reduced independence because of their difficulty with problem-solving and complex tasks, which consequently reduces their ability to maintain activities of daily living (O'Shea et al., 2014). The needs of a person living with dementia are therefore complex, and care staff require a range of skills and knowledge to be able to understand the individual and their physical, behavioural and psychological needs (Rahman, 2017). While there are no long-term cures, ways of alleviating symptoms are becoming increasingly available and accessible.

Music, whatever the style, has been shown to have positive effects in supporting people with dementia. Music can relax and awaken. Music has been shown to unlock forgotten memories, reaching parts of the brain in ways other forms of communication cannot, thus enabling the person to become musically receptive (Smurthwaite 2019). Age UK (2020) uses the power of music, especially singing in dementia care to access and unlock memories. For example, in the UK, organisations like Singing for the Brain and Golden Oldies make it possible for nursing homes and other groups to access musicians, both professional and amateur, many of whom are trained to work with a memory-impaired audience (Smurthwaite, 2019).

More non-pharmacological psychosocial interventions that can improve quality of life are becoming available and being used in dementia care settings, such as life story work, reminiscence therapy, music therapy, approaches to interaction and communication, environmental modifications and reality orientation (Jeong, 2019). These psychosocial interventions may help people living with dementia build coping strategies, reduce distress, and provide interpersonal and communication connections that may optimise the individual's remaining abilities (Hung et al., 2018; Johnston and Narayanasamy, 2016).

This paper presents a qualitative longitudinal study that explores and describes the experiences and processes of implementing an educational song programme in

Norway, Singing Nursing Homes. The study makes reference to the move away from pharmacological approaches to providing safer methods of managing pain, stress and symptom relief, while promoting improved quality of life in the care of older people with dementia in nursing homes. The study reports on the positive outcomes for patients, their relatives and for the staff in the nursing homes. Using singing as part of their 'art of caring' facilitated learning and practice that subsequently had a positive impact on the nursing home environment.

While the authors report on the limitations of the study, they do make strong recommendations for practice: promoting singing as a strategy to improve not only the health and well-being of older people in nursing homes but of the staff and the environment in which they co-exist.

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