

# Palliative Care for persons with dementia recommendations for person-centered and gender sensitive communication

Katharina Heimerl, Eva Eggenberger, Elisabeth Reitingger  
University Klagenfurt, IFF-Palliative Care and Organizational Ethics, Austria;

## 1 BACKGROUND

We live in an ageing society, at the same moment, dementia becomes increasingly prevalent. In all health care settings patients are increasingly old and old-old persons, the majority suffering from dementia. People with dementia are in need of palliative care, their condition is incurable and life-shortening. They do not only need palliative care at the very end of lives, but from the beginning on. They experience severe losses, they suffer from pain, physically, psychologically, socially and spiritually and they need comfort. To live with and care for women and men with dementia is an enormous challenge for all professional or informal care givers. Persons with dementia are in need of caregivers who are capable of communicating with them.



## 2 AIMS

The project is contracted by the ministry of health and aims at publishing recommendations for health and social professionals in nursing homes, hospitals and home care settings. The guidance targets at supporting professionals in dealing with challenging situations in the care of persons with dementia.

## 3 METHODS AND DESIGN

The recommendations draw on the several data sources: 1. A systematic review that assesses the evidence of skills training for persons with dementia 2. An in depth literature research on person-centered and gender sensitive communication 3. A research project that yielded two case studies concerning methods of person centered communication in nursing homes 4. Two interdisciplinary and qualitative group discussions in hospitals researching the question: What are major challenges in communicating with persons with dementia in nursing homes.

## Women and men with dementia Recommendations for person-centered and gender-sensitive communication for health and social care professionals

Dementia – a question of  
perspectives

Person-centered communication  
with people with dementia

Basic  
principles for  
communication  
with persons  
with dementia

Gender-  
sensitive  
communication

More than  
training:  
Organization  
development  
and  
sustainability

People with  
dementia in  
hospitals

People with  
dementia in  
nursing homes

At the end of  
life: palliative  
care is living  
until the end

## PERSON-CENTERED CARE

The approach of person-centered care goes back to Tom Kitwood. He witnessed, "a social environment of care that depersonalized, dehumanized and invalidated the person with dementia". Person-centered care does not look at the person with DEMENTIA but at the PERSON with dementia.

## GENDER SENSITIVE COIMUNICATION

Being a woman or a man is part of the personhood. Every communication and interaction bears aspects of "doing gender"...It makes a difference whether a man or a woman caregiver is in contact with a man or a woman with dementia. Respecting gender plays an important role in the care for persons with dementia.



Quelle: Kalender der  
Deutschen Alzheimer Gesellschaft 2006

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

Health professionals in hospital face major challenges while caring for persons with dementia. Whereas there already has been gathered considerable knowledge for communication with persons with dementia in nursing homes, there is a paucity of data and knowledge about the situation in hospitals. The guidance aims at bridging this gap and at transferring knowledge from nursing homes to hospitals and to home care.

To implement an person-centered and gender sensitive approach to communication in nursing homes and hospitals requires more than just training. It changes structures and culture in the organizations. Staff needs to adjust daily routines according to the needs of the persons with dementia and not vice-versa, a task that can only be performed when supported by the management.

## FUNDING

The project is funded by the Austrian Ministry of Health



**Contact:** Katharina Heimerl  
IFF-Palliative Care an Organizational Ethics  
1070, schittenfeldgasse 29/4, Austria  
Katharina.heimerl@aau.at

