

Staff experience of factors contributing to a quiet atmosphere during meals in two nursing home wards

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Background

Staff in two nursing home wards with patients with dementia and/or psychiatric diagnoses experienced several episodes of agitation during meals. They also reported that some of their colleagues successfully created a quiet atmosphere during meals and more generally in the ward. The head nurses wanted to develop the staff's competence and focus on 'knowledge sharing' in their wards.

Aims

Overall aim: To develop the competence of staff in how they contribute to a quiet atmosphere during meals, and to increase the staff's understanding of factors and mechanisms that contribute to agitation during meals or to a quiet atmosphere.

Aim of the present study: To describe the experiences of staff in contributing to a quiet atmosphere during meals.

Theoretical Framework

Progressively lowered stress threshold (PLST) model (1, 2).

Design and Method

Design of the overall study: Co-operative inquiry design.

Data collection methods:

- Interviews with staff (N = 6) who successfully created a quiet atmosphere.
- Reflection groups (staff N = 20) with discussion of episodes of agitation and strategies to prevent and handle such episodes.
- Interviews with staff (N = 7) about their experiences with changes and improvements during the project period.

Analysis: The interview texts and the texts from the reflection groups were analysed with a qualitative content analysis.

Results

- See figure.
- Staff were described as playing an important role in securing a quiet atmosphere during meals.
- To secure a quiet atmosphere during meals, an individualized and adjusted interaction between the nurse/nurse's aide and each resident was essential.
- Organizing quiet meals in nursing homes was described as important to the residents' experience of well-being and having "a nice day", as well as to their nutritional status.

Discussion & Conclusions

- Staff emphasized the importance of reducing stimuli in achieving a calm mealtime atmosphere, consistent with the PLST model (1, 2).
- The research literature often focuses on feeding difficulties, mealtime difficulties, and malnutrition among residents with dementia (3-7). The present study focused on how staff can contribute to a calm and friendly atmosphere during meals and in this way contribute positively to the residents' well-being, their experience of having "a nice day", and their ability to eat and thus to their nutritional status.
- This study also emphasized the importance of perceiving each meal as a process that starts before the residents sit down at the table, and not as an isolated task 'to be done'. The study indicated that ensuring a calm mealtime atmosphere is an essential part of the total care in a nursing home ward.
- Developing a revised plan for the meals in their own ward allowed the staff to more easily integrate the new activities into the daily practice of the ward.

Revised plan for the meal, developed by the staff of the two wards:

A "happy meal" in (name of the ward) requires:

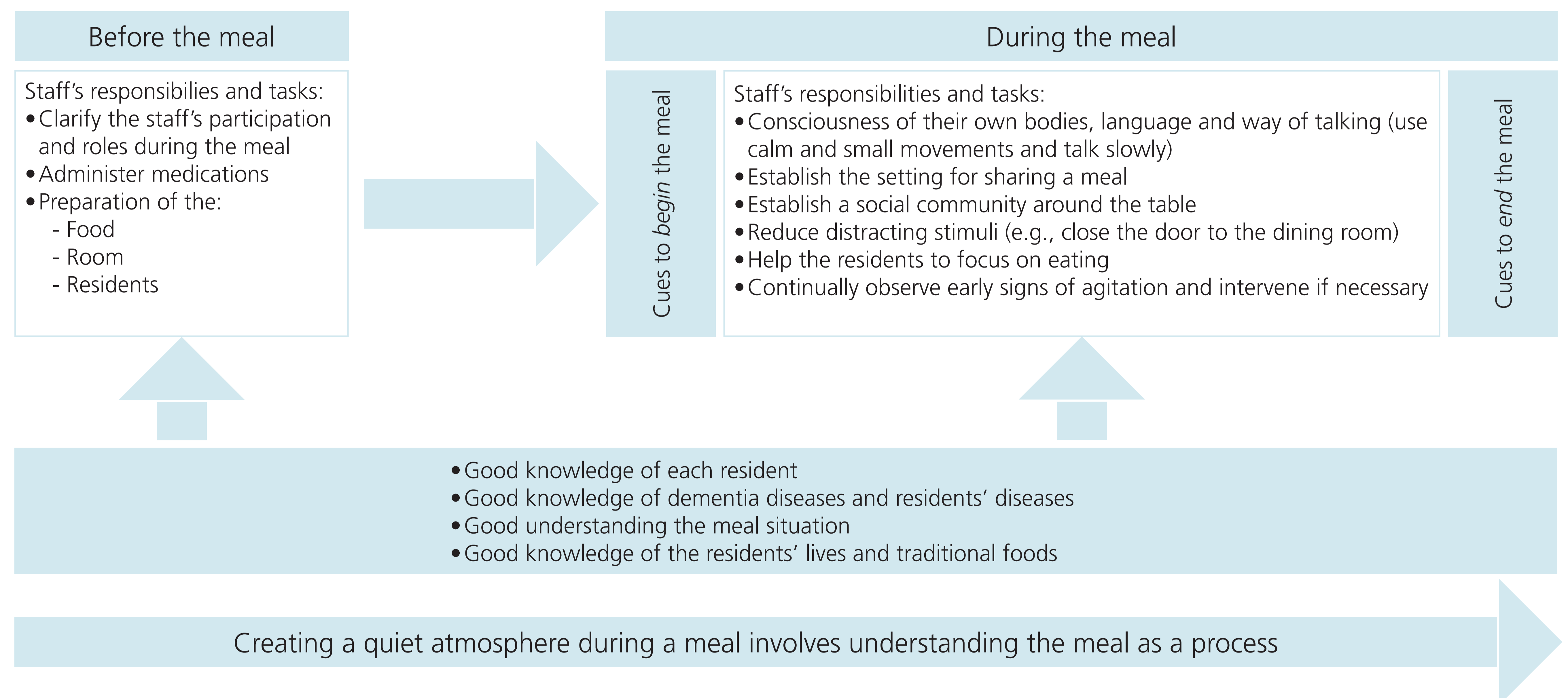


- everyone to walk slowly and talk calmly.
- everyone to sit down together with the residents when the food is served and the meal begins.
- medication to be administered before food is served and the meal begins.
- the door to the dining room to be closed.
- that the table is not cleared until all the residents have finished their meal.

Enjoy the meal!



Figure: Staff descriptions of how they can contribute to a calm atmosphere during meals



- References:
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