

Reminiscence in the Delivery of Quality Service: How Recording Life Stories Impacts the Lives of People with Alzheimer's, Dementia, or those with Mild Cognitive Impairment

ABSTRACT:

This white paper will summarize the large body of research documenting the effects of reminiscence with older adults. These studies reveal that reminiscence is effective for people with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. Objects are particularly useful in bringing back powerful memories. Life stories are also creating new conversations and bonds between families, staff, volunteers, students while leading to a higher sense of purpose and meaning for elders.

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It's time to tell your story

Background on Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia

Over 5 million people in the United States are living with Alzheimer's Disease today. Alzheimer's Disease is now the 7th leading cause of death. More than 50 percent of residents in assisted living and nursing homes have some form of dementia or cognitive impairment, and the numbers continue to increase. The national Alzheimer's Association has a number of recommendations for caring for people whether they live in a community setting or their own home. Social interaction is critically important and people facing with dementia do have a need for meaningful activities that build a sense of community and are fun. The Alzheimer's Association recommends that families and the person with dementia should summarize the individuals' life story including past experiences, personal preferences, and current capabilities.

Number of People with dementia (*Alzheimer's Association, 2007*)

Alzheimer's is the most common form of dementia affecting people over age 65.

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| 42% of people over 85 | 2,200,000 people |
| 19% of people ages 75-84 | 2,400,000 people |
| 2% of people 65-74 | 300,000 people |

Research Says...

Over 100 studies in the last decade prove that reminiscence is an important part of healthy aging and wellness. Sources: Critical Advances in Reminiscence Work, Jeffrey Webster and Barbara Haight, 2003. Tranformational Reminiscence, John Kunz and Florence Gray Soltys, 2007. Reminiscence and life review has been found to:

- Increase life satisfaction
- Lower or prevent depression
- Engage people with dementia
- Promote social interaction
- Reduce chronic pain
- Assist with cognitive orientation
- Improving staff/resident/family relations

Reminiscence and Wellness Work Hand in Hand

Studies have shown that older adults experience remarkable results when reminiscence and life review is encouraged.



Decreases Disorientation, Improves Social Interaction

A study demonstrated it is possible for older people with dementia to reminisce and that this is meaningful for them in particular, because of the losses associated with dementia. Another related case study used life review with groups of people with Alzheimer's disease. They were assigned to groups with some participating in life reviews and others did not. Results showed significance for life review groups in decreased disorientation and improvement in social interaction.

Increases Life Satisfaction

With female nursing home residents, a study randomly assigned participants to a reminiscence group, current events discussion, or no treatment group. The results showed significant increases in life satisfaction in the reminiscence group.

Improves Resident/Staff Relations

Nursing home residents were interviewed with and without staff present and in either a reminiscence/life review format or a format more focused on the present time. The attitudes of residents toward staff improved with reminiscence and with the staff's presence at interview.

Reduces Geriatric Depression

Newly relocated nursing home residents underwent a study to examine if life review could prevent clinical depression. Significant positive results were shown in reducing depression at the short-term testing stage with an additional decrease in depression and hopelessness at one year.

Increases Orientation, Competence After Relocation

A case study examined the use of a life review program with newly-relocated nursing home residents and it was found to decrease depression, while increasing orientation, perceived competence, and social interaction.

Increases Sense of Purpose and Meaning

After group therapy with older adults in long-term care setting over an 8-week period, this study found that the two treatment groups were significantly different from control group showing increased sense of purpose and meaning in their lives.

What is Retrogenesis and Why Does it Matter?

Dr. Barry Reisberg developed the term "retrogenesis" to describe the changes that Alzheimer's patients experience. People experience life in reverse order, regressing toward childhood. They may lose the ability to manage their checkbook, dress themselves, bathe regularly, control their bladder and bowels, or speak--reversing the order in which those skills were acquired as a child.

Because events from childhood will resurface potentially as time passes, the importance of knowing past events through understanding a person's life story—both positive or negative times of life—can be useful in delivering the best quality of care. Seeing the elder as a person who is moving backwards in time may help explain different behaviors and lead to understanding and love instead of criticism and ridicule.

Reminiscence Touches All Seven Dimensions of Wellness:

Physical - The hippocampus is “lit up” in 70-year-old subjects who were monitored while reminiscing, promoting brain fitness in this way.

Social – Assists people in getting to know one another whether they are new neighbors or already friends.

Emotional – Empowers people to review their accomplishments and remember the joys and challenges of life.

Vocational – Helps older adults have a job to do by giving the gift of their wisdom and values to their children, grandchildren, or other loved ones.

Spiritual – Explore and see the “big picture” of their lives and explore one’s spirituality and beliefs.

Environmental – Improves the environment of elders by surrounding them with people who see more as people and less as patients.

Intellectual – Provides ample opportunities for learning about one’s self and exploring creativity through personal or group storytelling.

Recommendations for Those That Work in Memory Care

1. Hold attention for short periods of time to gather memories. Asking just one question and listening intently for the answer...or giving the person choices for their answer may be helpful. “Tell me about a tree when you were a kid. Did you have an apple tree or a maple tree or another kind of tree?” Group settings may be ineffective when doing personal reminiscence work.
2. Use all the senses to the fullest – bring object associated reminiscence works. Bringing a branch of a tree, a leaf, or a pine cone will help prompt a memory of a tree when the person was younger.
3. Try “Outside the box” activities. Watching you do activities is okay too. Would a former scientist or professor enjoy watching or participating in a science experiment? Could someone who had a horse like to see children getting pony rides? If the life story is recorded, with the senior enjoy someone reading their stories to them and looking at the pictures?
4. Make creative storytelling happen – “based on a true story” is a good idea with pictures from magazines (or LifeBio’s StoryPictures) prompting the discussion. If you don’t remember your own story, then let’s make one up together!
5. Involve families because they should see reminiscence as an important part of ensuring quality of care and quality of life. If we don’t know someone, we can’t care as much for them. Knowing more details can allow us to connect in a more meaningful way.

6. Ensure there is genuine, loving one-on-one communication. Elders with memory impairment still know when they are being ignored or patronized in a conversation. Truly listening is a gift you can give to those with dementia—even if some things or all things don't make sense.

How Knowing More Truly Leads to Caring More

“To know them is to love them. Autobiography becomes an essential tool in the delivery of services to people facing dementia. It has been a “nice to have” in the past, but it is now a “need to have” to ensure we know enough to connect and to care. Can we help this incredible person feel more love, more hope, and more peace?

This opportunity still is there to communicate in a meaningful way if we think creatively.”

--Beth Sanders
Founder & President
LifeBio.com

SOURCES:

Webster, Jeffrey & Haight, Barbara. *Critical Advances in Reminiscence Work*. Springer Publishing. (2002)
Weil, Andrew. *Healthy Aging*. (2005)

Dementia Care Practice Recommendations for Assisted Living Residences and Nursing Homes. Alzheimer's Association. (2006).

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For more information on LifeBio's programs for elder communities and community-based organizations, please call 1-866-LIFEBIO or email us at info@lifebio.com. Please request an information packet on how to implement LifeBio in your community.