SELFHOOD, THE BODY, AND PERSON-CENTRED DEMENTIA CARE: USING DRAMA TO IMPROVE PRACTICE

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THEMATIC CATEGORIES

1. Social etiquette
2. Empathy
3. Creativity
   • The painterly hand
   • The musical self
   • Dance
SOCIAL ETIQUETTE
The kitchen was short staffed so there was no personal support worker readily available to feed Molly. I decided to lend a hand by buttering her slice of bread, spreading a generous amount of jam, and cutting it in half.

Molly looked at the bread for several long minutes. Then, she picked up one of the halves from her plate, carefully holding the crust so as not to get any jam on her fingers. She slowly placed a small bit between her teeth, not allowing her lips to touch the bread.

Leaning slightly forward she took a tiny bite, as if to allow the expectant crumbs to fall on her plate. Leaning back in her chair, and then placing the piece of bread back on the plate, she chewed very slowly while keeping the lipstick on her lips perfectly in place.
Molly took a bite of her buttered bread and as she chewed, she looked up at Dody, who sat directly across from her. Dody was using her napkin to clean her nostrils - twisting the corner of the napkin and inserting it into her nostril, turning it several times and then pulling it out. As Dody inspected the napkin after pulling it from her nose, Molly frowned and abruptly put her bread down on the table. She looked at the personal support worker with a scrunched up nose, the corners of her lips curved downwards, and furrowed brows. It was an expression of disgust.
EMPATHY
After breakfast Dora was in her wheelchair in a line-up of residents against the wall in the hallway. The resident next to her was crying out, ‘nurse, nurse’, and then started to weep and repeated the same phrase over and over – ‘I want to go home’.

Dora reached over and placed her hand gently on top of the resident’s forearm. Holding her hand there, she sang Tumbalalayka, a Yiddish lullaby.
Bertha was extremely agitated. She walked into the living room and sat down next to Ethel who was sleeping. Bertha’s cries woke up Ethel who watched her for a moment. Ethel put her hand on Bertha’s knee and leaned close to her body, looking at her face. Bertha’s cries quieted to a gentle moan. Ethel sat with her for most of the afternoon, eventually falling asleep with her hand still on Bertha’s knee. Bertha too had fallen asleep.
CREATIVITY
THE PAINTERLY HAND
DE KOONING
WOMAN 1948
DE KOONING
UNTITLED V 1982
DE KOONING
UNTITLED XII 1982
DE KOONING
UNTITLED XV 1982
DE KOONING
UNTITLED XVII 1984
THE MUSICAL SELF
DANCE
IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE
ARTS-BASED APPROACHES TO DEMENTIA CARE
EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES

- 12 week interprofessional educational intervention
- DVD: Expressions of Personhood in Alzheimer’s
New awareness that residents’ body movements and dispositions can convey meaning.

Deciphering meaning of behaviour and tailoring care.

Reduced agitation and the use of pharmacotherapies.

Improved time efficiency of practice.
If you put on the wrong shirt, they’ll kick it at you, or throw it away, and things like that.
If they don’t like fish and if you put fish in front of them, it turns out to be a really bad situation. You know, somebody could just knock it off the table.
We give her coffee, and then the daughter came and said “she’s English, she likes tea! She always have tea!” You know, so... sometimes we are doing the complete opposite of what they really want or what they’re used to.
In the middle of the night, 3:00am, he gets up and goes in the middle of the hallway, and he’s doing like this [demonstrating the motions of planting] because he is thinking that he is still a farmer and has to wake up early to plant the rice, or whatever.
There are a lot of war veterans who live here and I’ll never forget this one resident who I worked with. I had a hell of a time getting him to stand up from his wheelchair so we could work on his walking...He refused. One day I was thinking about who this man was, and what his life experiences were, and started singing the national anthem. Well you wouldn’t believe it but he stood up from his wheelchair and saluted me! So from then on we began our physio sessions with the national anthem.
If you approach a resident rushed... you know they’re not gonna cooperate, they’re gonna fight back, they’re gonna resist. And you’re gonna have to leave them, go do something else, and then come back.
1. Remember that even when the persons with dementia can’t speak, meaningful communication is possible. We often assume that when people are non-verbal that they are incapable of expressing themselves.
2. Knowing about culture, previous occupation or life-long hobbies is important. Biographical information can provide really helpful insight into what the person with dementia may enjoy eating, doing or celebrating. Knowing what they used to like can help you find activities they will still enjoy now.
3. Third, family members are an important part of the health care team. Their knowledge of their family member’s likes and dislikes, their cultural background and their favourite hobbies are very important pieces of information for health care staff to know so that care can be individualized.
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