Namaste Care: a life-enhancing programme for people with advanced dementia in care homes

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Background

Most people with advanced dementia in the UK live and die in care homes. In the later stages of dementia, people are profoundly physically and cognitively disabled; they are generally unable to engage in conventional activities and become marginalised.

The Namaste Care programme is a seven days a week care programme integrating compassionate nursing care with individualised, meaningful activities for people with advanced dementia at the end of their lives. Namaste Care seeks to engage people with advanced dementia through sensory input, especially touch, and to enrich their quality of life.

St Christopher’s Hospice and the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Hospital Trust have undertaken a research study in care homes in South London which evaluated the effects of Namaste Care on the quality of life of people with advanced dementia and those who care for them.

The study

Five care homes looking after people with dementia collaborated in an action research study. Care home staff received an introduction to Namaste Care which included role modelling. The Namaste Care programme was then implemented by each care home. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected before, during and after the programme from residents, care staff, managers and relatives.

Results and findings

Benefits for residents: Residents

- experienced overall reduction in the severity of neuro-psychiatric symptoms
- enjoyed different elements of the care programme, massage, music, food treats etc.
- were more alert, some were less agitated
- engaged more actively with others
- experienced a calm, relaxing approach to care.

**Benefits for care staff:** care staff found that the Namaste Care programme

- was enjoyable and rewarding
- helped them connect and communicate with residents
- encouraged them to be creative and learn new skills
- fostered easier, closer relationships with relatives
- increased confidence and self-esteem.

**Benefits for relatives:** families and friends

- perceived benefits for their relatives and welcomed Namaste
- experienced closer connection and communication with their family member
- expressed appreciation of the skill and commitment of care staff
- felt the atmosphere in the care homes became calmer and more homely
- some felt Namaste Care had a positive impact on their own quality of life.

**Benefits for care home managers:** care home managers found that Namaste Care fulfilled many of their objectives. The care programme:

- inspired care staff and improved teamwork
- offered an alternative structure for care delivery
- gave practical guidance to providing respectful, compassionate, person-centred care
- improved relationships and communication between care staff and relatives
- created a positive framework for end of life care conversations.

There was no evidence that the Namaste Care Programme caused harm.
Conclusion

Where there was strong leadership and good nursing and medical care, the Namaste Care programme improved the quality of life of residents with advanced dementia. The Namaste Care programme supported care homes to give more compassionate and dignified care to older people with advanced dementia at the end of life, and has potential to transform care throughout the sector.

We are piloting a ‘toolkit’/manual in workshops that incorporate the research findings, in order to support care homes implement Namaste Care.

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Journal article


Links to St Christopher’s website:


Link to Namaste Care website

www.namastecare.com