**An introduction to the Senses Framework**

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*The following is an extract from information that Social Care Wales (formerly Care Council for Wales) used at the 2016 Registered Managers Forum in Carmarthen.*Where did the 'Senses' come from and what is an enriched environment of care?  
Although the Senses Framework has been applied in both acute and community settings, it was initially developed with care homes in mind.  The framework was originally suggested by Mike Nolan (Nolan 1997), and since then it has been further elaborated upon over a number of years (see Davies et al 1999, Nolan et al 2006).  Nolan (1997) was concerned that care homes did not receive the recognition that they deserved, and that both academic writings and the policy literature tended to paint a very negative picture of what it was like to live and work there.  
  
For example, studies suggested that care homes provide 'aimless care' (Evers 1981), or at best 'good geriatric care' (Reed and Bond 1991) where the main goals are simply to ensure that residents are well fed, dressed and kept clean.  As important as these activities are, there is more to life than this.  Other 'good geriatric care' it has been suggested that staff have few therapeutic goals to aim for and that because of this they have little motivation for, or stimulation from, their work.  Indeed some argue that whereas staff in acute settings may suffer 'burnout' because of the highly demanding and rapidly changing nature of their work, staff in care homes are more likely to experience 'rust out' (Pennington and Pierce 1985) because they experience so little stimulation.  
  
Believing that staff in care homes are highly skilled and have to deal with often very complex situations, including increasing numbers of people with considerable physical and cognitive frailty, Nolan (1997), based on his experiences both as a practitioner and a researcher, proposed a framework that he hoped would enable care homes to demonstrate more clearly the important work that they undertake, and also enable staff to have a set of goals to aim for.  He argued that care homes should create an environment in which older people experience six 'Senses'.

These are:

* A sense of security - to feel safe and secure, not just physically but also psychologically.  That is to feel free from threat or harm, but not to the extent that no risks are allowed, and also, for example, to feel free to be able to complain without fear of reprisals.
* A sense of belonging - to feel 'part of things', both within the home and the wider community, and to be able to maintain existing relationships and form new ones.
* A sense of continuity - so that people's biography and life history are recognised and valued, and used to plan and deliver care that is consistent with their wishes and preferences.
* A sense of purpose - is about having valued goals to aim for, the sort of things that make it worth getting out of bed in the morning and provide a feeling of 'I have a contribution to make'.  It is important that older people in care homes have interesting things to do to pass the time, as many studies suggest that they spend up to 80% of their waking day doing nothing.
* A sense of achievement and to feel satisfied with your efforts.
* A sense of significance - although all the Senses are important, and each one is related to the next, for example you need a sense of purpose in order to be able to get a sense of achievement, a sense of significance is possibly the most fundamental sense of all.  This is about feeling that you 'matter', that your life has importance, and that other people recognise you and who you are.  As we age our sense of significance is threatened, as older people often suffer multiple losses (of work, of health, of a partner, or friends) and going into a care home also means the loss of your 'home'.  Therefore, creating an environment in which older people feel that they really 'matter' is crucial.  
    
  However, Nolan (1997) argued that if staff were to create these Senses for residents then they too had to experience the Senses for themselves.  Therefore if staff do not experience a sense of security, belonging, continuity and so on in their work, how can they be expected to ensure that residents experience the Senses?  This approach rightly sees staff well-being and satisfaction as being essential to residents' quality of life.  
  So, for example, staff need to experience a sense of security, not just to be free from physical or verbal abuse, but also to feel confident that they can complain about poor standards, if this is necessary, without risking losing their job.  They need to experience a sense of belonging, with there being good teamwork, a happy work atmosphere, and friendly relationships within the home.  A sense of continuity is essential, but can at times be difficult to achieve if there is high staff turnover and extensive use of agency staff.  The academic literature suggests that what staff in care homes often lack is a clear sense of purpose - what is their job about, and how do they know if they are doing it well?  Creating the Senses for residents helps to provide a sense of purpose for staff, but this requires that all the needs of residents are seen as important and not just their physical care.  Therefore, ensuring that residents are fully occupied and are encouraged to form friendships if they wish have to be seen as every bit as important as meeting their physical needs.  
    
  We all need a 'pat on the back' occasionally and to go home at the end of the day feeling, and being told, that we have 'done a good job'.  Staff therefore need to experience a sense of achievement with their efforts being recognised and valued.  Whilst the financial rewards in care homes are often limited, the potential for other rewards, for example, ensuring a good quality of life for residents, is as great.  Indeed, most of the research suggests that staff get their greatest satisfaction from their relationships with residents.  This needs to be fully recognised, but so too does the vulnerable position it may leave staff in.  So the grief that staff may feel when a resident they know well dies must also be acknowledged, and there should be support mechanisms in place to help staff deal with this grief if they are to feel 'secure' (ie safe) to form close relationships with residents in the future.  This demonstrates the ways in which each of the Senses influences the others.  They are therefore 'interdependent' rather than independent.  
    
  Last, and by no means least, staff must also experience a sense of significance.  Not only must they feel valued by the organisation they work for, but society must also recognise and see the value of the work they do.  There is perhaps some way to go before this is achieved but initiatives such as 'My Home Life' are leading the way.  
    
  Based on these ideas Nolan (1997) argued that an 'enriched' environment was one in which both residents and staff experience the Senses.  If one group does not, or one of the Senses is missing, then the environment is 'impoverished' to a greater or lesser extent.

**References (as cited in Nolan *et al.* 2006)**

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