Designing to optimise mental health in care homes for older people

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• 1 year project
• Funded by NHS Estates
• Carried out at Oxford Brookes University and Warwick University
• An investigator and researcher at each university:
  – Bart Sheehan/Elly Gilbert at Warwick
  – Elizabeth Burton/Kristina Stockdale Juhlberg at Brookes
• The WISE (Wellbeing in Sustainable Environments) research unit
  – Elizabeth Burton and Lynne Mitchell
  – Investigating the impacts of the built environment on people’s wellbeing and quality of life
  – Generating evidence-based design guidance
  – Focus on older people, but extending to other ages and groups
• Neighbourhoods for Life concept
• New book out in March 2006
Background 1

- With proportion of older people in population rising, increasing numbers are likely to live in care homes in the future.
- Mental health problems, including dementia and depression are common in this setting.
- Rates of depression in care home residents often found to be 20-40%.
• Depression in care home residents often not diagnosed or treated
• Interventions such as screening residents and training staff are effective but not easy to implement
• Improving the physical environment has the potential to reduce depression
Research aims

- To investigate how the built environment in care homes for older people influences mood among residents
- To establish which built environment features are positive for mood
Research outcomes

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- A tool for measuring/recording the design characteristics of care homes (tested for reliability in 5 homes – over 90% items achieved perfect agreement)
- Preliminary recommendations on design characteristics of care homes likely to enhance mood
• 20 homes in Oxfordshire and Coventry took part in the study
• 81 residents were interviewed in depth about the design of their home and individual design features represented through photos
• The design characteristics of each care home were recorded using a checklist (to investigate relationships with resident data)
Resident interview data

- Background data and rating of mood
- Preferences among sets of photographs in which single design characteristics were varied, and reasons for preferences
- Views about design of their own care home, which aspects were most +ve and –ve for mood and views in detail on individual spaces
Care home design data

- Overall building
  - Location and nearby facilities
  - Type, height, form and size of building
  - Type of access

- Individual spaces
  - Décor, style, lighting, signage, flooring and furnishings
  - Size, shape, open-ness, ability to see outside
  - Ability to be private, to personalise space
Individual spaces

- Approach and external entrance
- Entrance hall
- Stairs/lifts
- Corridors
- Communal bathrooms/toilets
- Main lounge
- Dining room
- Kitchen
- Bedrooms (inc. bathrooms)
- Garden
About the care homes

- Most in urban settings
- 12 voluntary sector, 7 private and 1 housing association
- 4 in Victorian buildings, the rest are fairly modern (1960s onwards)
- Size ranges from 6 to 60 places
- 5 offer specialist dementia care
About the participants

- Average age was 85 years
- Three quarters were female
- Over a third were considered by lead carer to have dementia
- Half required assistance in at least 4 major activities of daily living
- Majority had visual impairment, half had hearing impairment and three quarters could still walk without a wheelchair
General responses

- Residents, including very dependent ones and those with dementia, were keen to express views on the influence of built environment on their mood
- Vast majority of residents reported positive mood
Views of own home

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- Majority were satisfied with home, and would not wish to move home if could do so
- Most use very small number of rooms
- Features reported as very +ve for mood included gardens, general décor, bedroom design and furniture
- Moderately +ve for mood were communal rooms – lounges and dining rooms
Views of own home

- Entrance halls produced least +ve responses
- Own bedroom of key importance
  - Over half stated it was their favourite place in the building
  - Seen to provide privacy, comfort and opportunity to personalise
Design preferences

- Strong and specific preferences expressed for
  - Soft landscaping of gardens, with variety of planting
  - Accessible design of gardens
  - Single storey buildings
  - Assisted bathrooms
  - Grouped seating arrangements
  - Multifunctional spaces
  - Open, transparent design of internal spaces
Influences on mood

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• Analyses of care home design checklist data with interview data suggests mood influenced by:
  – Satisfaction with design of bedroom
  – Group living (clustered in sub-units)
  – Pleasant outdoor views
  – Open, transparent design
Significant findings

• Gardens of great value for mood but often not accessible
• Practical issues (ease of access) of greater concern than desire for ‘homeliness’ or familiarity
• Views of garden or greenery, especially from bedrooms and communal areas, important for mood
Recommended design 1

• General layout
  – Accessible (single-storey, self-operated lifts, easy access to outdoor space)
  – Residents clustered in small groups with their own communal spaces
  – Open-plan internal communal spaces
  – Views maximised, preferably to gardens and greenery
  – Outdoor space provided
Recommended design 2

- **Communal areas**
  - Open, clear internal views between rooms
  - Grouped seating, partitions and clusters of seats
  - Views out, preferably to gardens and greenery

- **Bathrooms**
  - Assisted, including grab rails, alarms, assisted baths with height adjustable seat and space for assistants
Recommended design 3

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- **Bedrooms**
  - Plenty of space
  - Bright rooms with maximum natural light
  - Views to gardens or greenery, preferably that can be seen from seated position or bed
  - Familiar or personalised décor

- **Outdoor spaces**
  - Easy to access (e.g. path around garden)
  - Soft landscaping and varied planting
Reflections

• Bigger study needed
• Expectation of residents low, but this likely to change as baby boomer generation ages
• Many recommendations easy to implement
• Implications for urban renaissance – more space needed, preferences for greenery?