

Use of life stories as memory training (reminiscence) in elderly care

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Introduction: Elderly, older than 75 years, whom was born and raised in Finnmark was in Oct 1944 deported by the Germans, in The World War II. They were deported from their homes and experienced loss of livelihoods, slaughtering of animals, all while houses, buildings and boats all burnt. The people from Finnmark were relocated in the south of Norway to live as refugees in their own country. The elderly of Finnmark need to tell their life stories so that nurses can understand them better and address their care of needs. METHOD: The material is based on memory work within two groups of elderly women (n=9). One group: in day ward at a nursing home (n=6), the other: a focus group where elderly women living at home (n=3) was writing their own life stories. The communication was interactive, a moderator helped keeping on track. Both groups started as pilots. The purpose of the memory work was to have meaningful memory work, avoid stagnation and stress connected to their experiences and maintain memory and language in older age. RESULTS: How deportation influenced their lives was a recurring theme. It became clear that there is a need to have targeted conversations about the deportation. Many of the elderly still have trouble talking about the evacuation, and after they returned much of their story was suppressed and forgotten. DISCUSSION: Elderly care in Finnmark is influenced by the fact that nursing home residents have a story that should be both told and understood. The deportation of Finnmark left a strong mark on the people it affected. Authentic movies and written accounts tell us that the deportation was both traumatising and brutal. Finnmark is rural and remote, and characterised by its small communities. Its nursing homes are also small, and if their staff have local and cultural knowledge, this can create a good opportunity to promote the idea that each resident's story can be used for meaningful conversations and person-centred care. Old voices must be heard.

References

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