

True doors: A story behind the street door

Marijn Voorhaar MSc^a

^aTrue doors, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, E: marijn@truedoors.com

M. Voorhaar. True doors: A story behind the street door. Gerontechnology 2016;14(3):177-178; doi:10.4017/gt.2016.14.3.003.00 A decal of a street door of a former home (a so called true door) can trigger pleasant memories of former independent life in adults suffering from dementia or certain psychiatric problems. This way true doors could support the feeling of being at home in the nursing home. First evaluation results of the true doors look promising with positive effects on both residents and staff.

Keywords: dementia, true doors, feeling at home, reminiscence, orientation

Decals (actual size stickers) of former street doors that are stuck to indoor apartment-doors of nursing homes are designated as well-being true doors (TDs) (*Figure 1*). TDs are meant for people with dementia, because for them the nursing-home environment is commonly not recognised as 'home'. Personalisation of the entrance door to their room could create a more familiar living environment helping these older persons to feel at home in the nursing home. In Belgium and the Netherlands, up to 400 TDs have been installed. The first evaluation results are positive¹.

EVALUATION

In spring 2015 the Trimbos Institute (Dutch National Institute of Mental Health and Addiction) conducted an explorative study, to research the impact of TDs on the well-being of older residents suffering from dementia or psychiatric problems. Research topics included effects on orientation and recognition, on feeling at home, privacy, reminiscence, social interaction and mood.

The study has been performed in D'n Aok, a nursing home in Veenendaal, The Netherlands. It included two closed wards, one with adults suf-



Figure 1. Residents of a nursing home with a decal (actual size sticker) of their former street door stuck to their current indoor apartment-door

fering from dementia, and the other with psychiatric patients. Both wards being populated with nine residents. Of these 18 adults, 15 received a decal of their former street door. The other three residents did not join the project, as family members believed the dementia of their relative had progressed too far for this aid to orientation.

Three weeks after installation of the decals, 14 members and volunteers of the nursing staff, and six family members of the residents, participated in semi-structured individual interviews. They shared their experiences, perceptions and thoughts about the value of TDs. Due to the target group's stage of dementia, residents were not personally interviewed.

RESULTS

According to 10 of the 20 persons interviewed, residents seemed to feel more at home, after receiving a TD. The nursing staff reported that this probably occurred because a street door is associated with home, rather than with a room in a ward. It was mentioned by six of the interviewed that after installation of the decal some residents started to refer to their living space as 'my home'. Ten of 14 members of the nursing staff stated that for some residents this led to a greater sense of privacy. One restless resident stopped his usual waiting at the closed ward door, since the TD let him find 'his home', his familiar place¹.

Both staff and family concluded that the decals supported orientation. They also reported that

the TD made it easier for them to assign a home to a resident¹.

The decals were also used by the nursing staff and family members for reminiscence purposes¹. Sharing life stories can positively influence self-esteem and mood², while staff members learn more about the residents' personal histories³. TDs also helped family members to share memories with their relatives. Eight of the interviewed noticed that residents started walking together through the hallways of the nursing home, while discussing the different street doors, implying that TDs stimulate social interaction between residents, their family and the nursing staff¹.

All respondents mentioned the aesthetic value of the decals. Residents seem to enjoy their doors and feel proud of them, most notably among residents with psychiatric problems. Staff and family pointed out the more intimate and cosy atmosphere, since installation of the doors¹.

CONCLUSION

The results of the decals are promising and imply that in a nursing home TDs have a positive impact on older residents with dementia or psychiatric problems¹. TDs contributed to patient-centred care, by respecting and celebrating the individual stories and needs of this vulnerable group.

Feedback on more recent projects and information about the use of decals of former street doors is available⁴.

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