

M. NIEMELÄ, M. YLIKAUPPILA, H. TALJA. **Long-term use of Paro the therapy robot seal: The caregiver perspective.** *Gerontechnology* 2016;15(suppl):135s; doi:10.4017/gt.2016.15.s.800.00

Purpose Paro the therapy robot seal is one of the few robot applications that has gained commercial success and has been in long-term use in care facilities. For older adult users with memory impairment, Paro has been reported to decrease anxiety and depression and enhance socialisation and communication^{1,2}. Professional caregivers have perceived Paro as positive and useful for the elderly³. They use Paro 1-3 hours on average per week, usually as an activity to stimulate or entertain residents and only sometimes as a socio-pedagogic tool⁴. Paro has also improved the moods of older residents, which has resulted in decreased mental strains of nursing staff⁵. Our research question is what is the actual value and impact of Paro from the perspective of the caregiver and careworkers? Do caregivers find Paro valuable and for what types of usage, and does help reduce their work load? Is Paro paving the way for more advanced robots capable of physical assistance and complex interaction? **Method** We have carried out and analysed three focus group interviews with altogether 10 professional caregivers in three dementia care homes, which have had access to Paro for at least one year. However, Paro circulates between departments so the caregivers in one department typically use Paro 1-2 months at a time and could have periods of several months of non-use.

Results & Discussion All three care homes shared the common practice of using Paro as a recreational object in resident group meetings, and always with a caregiver present and assisting the interaction. In one care home, Paro was found to be effective for decreasing anxiety of a resident in specific situations like dressing. This kind of targeted use was not a common practice in other two care homes. Paro was not provided to family members of the residents to support social interaction, although all participants specified that Paro would be beneficial for some. Although Paro had been (in principle) available for over a year, there was no clear process for using Paro. Usage was person-dependent. The value of Paro for caregivers was that it had a positive impact on the resident's emotions and functional ability i.e. the caregiver perceived that Paro was able to calm down the resident and facilitate conversation, which supports the older person to perceive her/himself as an active doer, not just a passive receiver of care. In that sense, Paro has an instrumental value in helping the caregiver provide high quality care by bringing "good moments" to the resident for at least a short period of time. In addition, the caregivers gave Paro intrinsic value in perceiving Paro positive for themselves i.e. they can caress Paro as well and the feeling can be intensive and caring. Otherwise, we could not identify any other impact of Paro in care routines. Based on this study, caregivers would benefit from these examples as sharing Paro practices with other departments can optimize the usage potential of Paro.

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