

POSTER SESSION 2

Strategies for persons living with dementia at risk of going missing: Applying the goldilocks principle

N. Neubauer, C. Daum, L. Liu

Neubauer et al. (2020). *Gerontechnology* 19(suppl); <https://doi.org/10.4017/gt.2020.19.s.69784>

Purpose The prevalence of older adults with dementia going missing is increasing (Alzheimer's Disease International, 2016), causing community organizations, policy makers and health professionals to look at ways to protect this population (Neubauer et al., 2018). A common strategy to mitigate the risks of wandering is to restrict movement of the person at risk by locking doors. This limits the ability of residents to engage in meaningful activities and be socially included in their communities. Technologies, such as wearable GPS devices, and mobile apps can help care partners have peace of mind when a vulnerable older adult goes missing. This strategy is effective if there is a "good" fit between the person, environment, and technology. In fact, some effective strategies do not involve technology. The purpose of this research was to understand and describe the Goldilocks (or "just-right") Principle when identifying strategies to address risks of going missing among persons living with dementia. **Methods** This study used a qualitative descriptive approach. We conducted semi-structured individual phone interviews with caregivers, persons living with dementia, health professionals, police, and staff from community organizations. We asked participants about their strategies to manage dementia-related wandering, and how their perceptions of risk, personal factors, environment and technology type influenced their management of dementia-related wandering. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and subjected to directed content analysis. **Results and Discussion** Participants were persons with mild dementia (n = 6), family caregivers (n = 10), nurses (n = 7), social workers (n = 4), law enforcement and search and rescue members (n = 5), staff of community organizations (n = 4), an occupational therapist (n = 1), and a geriatric psychiatrist (n = 1). Overall, perceived risk, personal factors and environment were important factors in the management of dementia-related wandering. In terms of risk perception, most participants expressed that family caregivers do not see the risk of the person with dementia getting lost until a serious lost event has occurred, leading to the use of reactive rather than proactive strategies. Thus, a caregiver's risk perception can immediately move from low risk to high risk after a serious adverse event, resulting in restricting independence (e.g., confinement). To avoid this sudden shift in risk perception, a balance of risk and safety, as a concept, would help ensure that a good quality of life is maintained. We propose the "Goldilocks Principle on Dementia and Wayfinding" to describe this balanced approach. This principle highlights the need for the person-environment fit to be "just right". This principle is reflected in a conceptual framework that would capture proactive strategies to mitigate the risks associated with getting lost. When a management strategy is just right, "optimal risk" is considered for each individual rather than approaching each situation with the same strategy.

References

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Keywords: dementia, wandering, older adults, guidelines, framework

Address: Faculty of Applied Health Sciences, University of Waterloo, Canada

Email: noelannah.neubauer@uwaterloo.ca