

# Living at a green care farm

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# Valorization



This chapter describes the societal impact of the current dissertation. A broader perspective is given on what the research described in this dissertation means for the redesign of care in nursing homes for people with dementia. First, relevant lessons learned from green care farms are highlighted. Second, future directions for research are discussed. Third, activities for the dissemination of this dissertation's findings are elaborated on.

## LESSONS LEARNED FROM GREEN CARE FARMS

In January 2017 a quality framework for nursing homes was published in the Netherlands. It focuses on themes such as person centered care, well-being, providing a meaningful day, and improving quality of care through leadership and staffing. Nursing homes should strive to provide care for people with dementia that suits the wishes, preferences, and needs of their residents. Promoting autonomy, social interactions, and participating in meaningful activities are key ingredients within this developing care vision. These themes also come up when looking at which lessons can be learned from research on green care farms<sup>1</sup>. It shows that people with dementia and their family caregivers consider green care farms to be a valuable variation to the existing long-term care services.

*Lesson 1: Take preferences and remaining capacities of people with dementia as a starting point*

Rather than focusing on limitations of residents, green care farms take their remaining capacities as a starting point. Green care farms provide residents with a broad spectrum of activities and are able to align these activities with differences in needs and wishes. Although this may sound obvious, this is not always the case in other types of nursing homes. Too often in regular nursing homes routines of the organization determine daily life with little opportunity for individual choice. For example, activities are only offered in a group, with limited or no personal adaptation.

*Lesson 2: Ensure that the care environment includes stimulating elements in daily care*

Research has identified several valuable elements of green care farms such as the physical environment, and the opportunity to promote meaningful social interactions and activities. The physical environment of a green care farm includes potentially beneficial elements such as outdoor areas, activity areas, stables, gardens, animals, etc.

At green care farms many elements of the environment are naturally incorporated into normal daily life. For instance, some residents get the milk from the cows every

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<sup>1</sup> De Bruin S., de Boer B., Beerens H.C., Buist Y. & Verbeek H. Rethinking Dementia Care: The Value of Green Care Farming. *Journal of the American Medical Directors Association*, 2017;18(3). Doi:10.1016/j.jamda.2016.11.018

day, set the table in the morning, or help with preparing dinner. At other nursing homes, activities are organized as separate interventions, at fixed moments in time, which prevent them from being integrated into normal daily life. This indicates that existing nursing homes should focus more on providing ways to incorporate activities as part of daily life and care. This can be done by making sure that the physical environment enables residents to initiate an activity, for instance by leaving the dishes in the sink, or having a broom standing outside. The idea is that activities are not organised in a specific area or at a specific moment in time, they should always be present. Furthermore, it is important that nursing homes train their nursing staff on how to engage residents in meaningful activities. It is helpful to provide coaching on the job or by provide example situations (instead of playing a game, or just asking whether a residents wants to join you for a walk, telling them you need help with getting the groceries; or setting the table). It is then also important that staff knows the residents and that they can use this knowledge to provide activities.

### *Lesson 3: Leadership and vision aimed at implementing a radically different care philosophy*

Other nursing homes often also have physical environmental aspects that can be beneficial for residents. Yet, these facilities are not always used. This proves that besides the physical environment, other elements might be more important to promote person centered care. Research suggests that leadership and the care vision at green care farms is a decisive factor as well. Managers at green care farms show that it is important to share a vision within the organization aimed at person centered care, autonomy, and offering fitting activities to individual residents. Furthermore, thinking in possibilities, and being open to ideas from nursing staff, and focusing on providing freedom to both residents and staff is of great importance.

Using an environment to its' full potential also requires creativity of nursing staff. Being able to organize individually tailored activities that are naturally incorporated into normal daily care practices requires certain skills and competences of nursing staff. Managers at green care farms try to create an optimal skill mix by selecting and developing the necessary competences within their team. Furthermore, evaluating whether the care that is being provided is in line with their care philosophy is an ongoing and continuous process.

Continuously evaluating the quality of care within individual teams is something that requires more attention at existing nursing homes. Still, nursing home staff is often working based on routines and habits, without critically evaluating their own behaviour. In the Netherlands, there is now a guideline to discuss staffing issues within teams. The central question in this guideline is: do our knowledge, capabilities, and way of working match with the wishes and desires of the residents? Implementing a continuous

evaluating culture within teams at nursing homes can influence the care that is being provided.

## **FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Many research opportunities follow this dissertation. First, more research is needed on roles, tasks, and competences of nursing staff working in different types of nursing homes. Data gathered during the research described in this dissertation will be used for further studies as there is information available that has not been used yet. For instance, interviews with nursing staff regarding their experiences with different types of nursing homes, and which competences and skills they need working in a particular type of nursing home will be used for further research.

Second, studies on how to implement successful elements of innovative nursing homes into regular nursing homes are needed. There might be several facilitating factors and barriers when implementing elements into regular nursing homes. These need to be identified, in order to improve the implementation process.

Third, investigating how to improve the match between a nursing home and their residents is of great importance. People with dementia are a heterogeneous group which calls for a heterogeneous spectrum of nursing homes that fit individual preferences, needs, and wishes. Research on improving the transition from home towards a nursing home is therefore necessary. It is important to include informal caregivers when investigating possible changes in the transition process. As they are the ones that are confronted with these complex situations, and studying how to improve the transition process for them is important.

## **OBSERVING THE DAILY LIVES OF NURSING HOME RESIDENTS AS A MEASURE OF QUALITY**

In line with recent policy developments with regard to evaluating the quality of nursing homes, the daily life of nursing home residents was the primary outcome of this dissertation. Instead of only focusing on clinical outcomes, the health care inspectorate in the Netherlands started to focus more on the residents' perspective of care, and is pilot testing observational methods to do this. The Maastricht Electronic Daily Life Observation Tool (MEDLO-Tool) used in this dissertation can be seen as a first step of getting insights into the perspective of the residents. The MEDLO-Tool was developed for the research purposes of this dissertation, and has received considerable attention since then. It is now being used by other national and international research teams and will be developed further in the future. In Germany, a study is being conducted that will

provide more information regarding the usability, the reliability and validity of the tool. In Norway, the MEDLO-tool is being used to assess the daily lives of people with dementia going to green care farms providing day care services in comparison with regular day care services.

It is important to keep spending attention to new ways for evaluating quality of care, as they should be focused on the perspective of the residents. By using observations, research and practice can get a grasp on what it is like to be a resident in a particular nursing home. Experiencing the boredom and tension, but also the joy during a day at a nursing home provides rich information that can be used to improve daily practice.

## **DISSEMINATION OF THIS DISSERTATION'S FINDINGS.**

Findings of this dissertation are disseminated for the scientific audience through articles published in peer-reviewed, international journals, and presentations given at several national and international conferences. Furthermore, the project has received attention in the media as well. Articles within newsletters from the International Psychogeriatric Association and the American Medical Directors Association were published. Interviews were given, and published within Trouw and de Limburger. Also, a radio interview was broadcasted on L1 Radio. Smaller columns have been written in several magazines. The German magazine Pro Alter has published an extensive article about the project.

In order to disseminate the findings of this dissertation further, several steps will be taken. First, a summary factsheet of the results from this dissertation will be distributed among all long-term care organizations who are a member of the Living Lab in Ageing & Long-Term Care in the province of Limburg. In addition, the factsheet will also appear on their website (<http://www.academischewerkplaatsouderenzorg.nl>).

Furthermore, together with the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment a short (Dutch) report entitled 'Zorgboerderijen als innovatieve zorgomgeving voor mensen met dementie, welke elementen kunnen worden overgenomen?' has been published recently and will also be available in the website of the Living Lab. This report provides information on which lessons can be learned from green care farms, and gives a first impression on how successful elements of green care farms should be implemented in regular long term care services.

The MEDLO-Tool including a Dutch, German, and English manual is also freely accessible on the website of the Living Lab.