

Adaptability in Older People: A Mixed Methods Approach

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Abstract : Adaptability is the capacity to adjust without great difficulty to changing circumstances. Within our project, we aimed to detect whether older people living within a long-term care hospital lose the ability to adapt. Theoretical concepts are contradictory in their statements. There is also lack of evidence in the literature how the adaptability of older people changes over the time. Following research questions were generated: Are older residents of a long-term care facility able to adapt to changes within their daily routine? How long does it take for older people to adapt? The study was designed as a convergent parallel mixed method intervention study, carried out within a four-month period and took place within seven wards of a long-term care hospital. As a planned intervention, a change of meal-times was established. The inhabitants were surveyed with qualitative interviews and quantitative questionnaires and diaries before, during and after the intervention. In addition, a survey of the nursing staff was carried out in order to detect changes of the people they care for and how long it took them to adapt. Quantitative data was analysed with SPSS, qualitative data with a summarizing content analysis. The average age of the involved residents was 82 years, the average length of stay 45 months. The adaptation to new situations does not cause problems for older residents. 47% of the residents state that their everyday life has not changed by changing the meal times. 24% indicate 'neither nor' and only 18% respond that their daily life has changed considerably due to the changeover. The diaries of the residents, which were conducted over the entire period of investigation showed no changes with regard to increased or reduced activity. With regard to sleep quality, assessed with the Pittsburgh sleep quality index, there is little change in sleep behaviour compared to the two survey periods (pre-phase to follow-up phase) in the cross-table. The subjective sleep quality of the residents is not affected. The nursing staff points out that, with good information in advance, changes are not a problem. The ability to adapt to changes does not deteriorate with age or by moving into a long-term care facility. It only takes a few days to get used to new situations. This can be confirmed by the nursing staff. Although there are different determinants like the health status that might make an adjustment to new situations more difficult. In connection with the limitations, the small sample size of the quantitative data collection must be emphasized. Furthermore, the extent to which the quantitative and qualitative sample represents the total population, since only residents without cognitive impairments of selected units participated. The majority of the residents has cognitive impairments. It is important to discuss whether and how well the diary method is suitable for older people to examine their daily structure.

Keywords : adaptability, intervention study, mixed methods, nursing home residents

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