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## Effect of Variable Activities on the Engagement of Memory Care Patients

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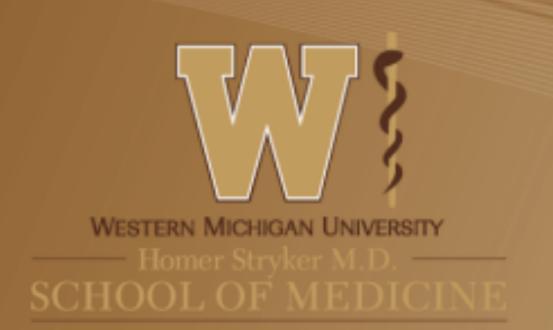
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# Effect of Variable Activities on the Engagement of Memory Care Patients

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SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

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# Introduction

Aging is a process that all individuals experience, directly or indirectly. One of the more difficult facets of aging is neurocognitive decline. In a review of the worldwide prevalence of dementia, Americans aged 60-64 had a 1% prevalence of dementia, but with advanced age, this prevalence increased to 47% for individuals older than 90¹. Most forms of dementia are progressive diseases, starting with cognitive decline and short-term memory deficits that gradually lead to impairment of activities of daily living². Although a variety of psychopharmacologic agents are in development, currently, no cure exists for this condition³. In order to increase quality of life, some memory care facilities have created activity-centered programs in an attempt to slow the progression of dementia and retain some cognitive function in this patient population.

# Study Goal

As part of completion of the Active Citizenship component of the Western Michigan University Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine curriculum, five medical students investigated the engagement of Heritage Community memory care residents in various activities offered to them from July 2016 to December 2016. These memory care residents had varying degrees of cognitive decline secondary to neuropathological disease processes. The purpose of the project was to identify any strengths and weaknesses in activity programming to engage memory care residents. Furthermore, the students' ongoing interactions with the residents provided them with the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences on how better to communicate with geriatric and/or dementia populations. Furthermore, the study allowed students to complete an abbreviated "Best Friends" training program to assist them in interacting with these residents.

# Methods

Medical student investigators attended organized activities at Amber Place, a facility within Heritage Community that provides support specifically for memory care residents<sup>4</sup>. Visits occurred twice per month for two hours per session, over a period of six months. During each session, students observed residents as they participated in the day's activities, and recorded observations about the Activity Effectiveness in engaging residents, a Personal Reflection that included students' evaluations of their own experiences, and a Reflection on Dementia regarding attitudes toward dementia patients and geriatric care. Student reflections were compiled and analyzed to identify common themes between activities and attitudes.



# Results

The results of this study demonstrated that the activities at Amber Place consistently went as planned and were effective in engaging memory care residents. The programming ranged from mild physical activity via tossing balloons, to more passive activities such as Bible study and listening to music. It was noted that activity effectiveness varied by activity and day. The study was limited by the inability to measure activity effectiveness across differing days of the week, as well as by a limited sample size. It was not uncommon for residents to join and subsequently leave activities. Sometimes residents were uneager to engage at first, but with some persuading, sat quietly and eventually participated.

## Conclusions

Overall, this study shows the effectiveness of a variety of different activities in maintaining a stimulating environment for memory care residents at Heritage Community. In particular, the residents seemed to appreciate the consistency of activities and recognized when a given activity would be occurring (ie. anticipating visits from therapy dogs). Not only did the programming appear to improve the quality of life of the residents, these activities also had a positive impact overall on medical student attitudes and comfort level with caring for patients with dementia. This project ultimately demonstrates that there are numerous opportunities for further research into resident engagement and activity programming at Heritage Community. Given that the development of dementia has generally been associated with a lower quality of life<sup>5</sup>, these results may eventually be expanded to inform many other assisted living facilities dedicated to the care of patients with this disease. Activity impact on resident engagement and emotional health is a particularly important area to direct further research with quantitative measures.

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