

Internship Report



<http://www.fiammettacoggi.it/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/terapia-bambola-doll.jpg>, 12.11.2015

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In the following I will report on my experiences during my internship in the retirement home “Asp Lodovico Martelli” at Figline Valdarno, Florence, Italy. For a period of 5 weeks, I was working on the Alzheimer Floor of this institution. During this period I was guided by the psychologist of the retirement home.

To start with, on the Alzheimer Floor are living 17 elderly. Most of them are staying there day and night and a few are returning to their families overnight. The Alzheimer Floor is constructed in a special way so that the daily routine for the elderly and the nurse becomes easier. For instance, it is a closed floor aiming that the elderly can walk around but do not escape. Especially, the elderly having the *Wandering* tend to run away. The *Wandering* is one characteristic of Alzheimer’s disease and implies that the Alzheimer patients are walking around continuously. Additionally, in order to prevent that they get the impulse to escape the main doors of the floor are painted. As a consequence, the elderly do not recognize the door as an exit but they recognize the items which are painted on the door (Picture 1). The Alzheimer Floor is also constructed circularly (Picture 2). Thus the elderly feel free to walk around.

What is more, people suffering from Alzheimer’s disease do recognize themselves more probably on pictures which show them when they were young. That’s why, at the entrance of the sleeping rooms of the residents are suspended pictures of themselves from the past (Picture 3). In addition to that, on the walls of the whole floor you can find pictures which show their village Figline Valdarno in the past. As elderly suffering from Alzheimer’s disease are more likely to recognize pictures from the past this can be used as a great way to stimulate their senses.

Furthermore, on this floor are undertaken several activities aiming to stimulate the skills of the elderly. These activities are leaded by the animator of the retirement home and it was also my task to assist at these activities. Examples for these activities are: cooking or baking traditional food, washing clothes, ironing, gardening or doing the washing up (Picture 6). These activities are the kind of work the elderly did during their whole life, hence they still know very well how to do it and they make positive experiences.

Another important aspect in the daily routine of the elderly is the “Pausa Caffè” and the “Momento Relax”. The “Caffè” has always played a fundamental role in the life of the elderly. Therefore, taking a cup of coffee all together is a major issue for them. Also, the smell of the coffee stimulates their senses and probably makes them remembering certain moments from the past. Additionally, during the “Momento relax” the elderly have the opportunity to listen to relaxation music and the nurses massage their hands.

Moreover, my task was to put into praxis the doll therapy (Picture 7). This is a special therapy for elderly with Alzheimer’s disease. Basically, the elderly should recognize a particular doll as a real baby. This doll has certain features which make it resembling a true baby. This therapy is applied in order to calm or to stimulate the elderly. Though, the doll has necessarily to be recognized as a real

baby otherwise there is no or less therapeutic success. The doll therapy primarily works well with female elderly considering the fact that they principally took care of the children in the past. During the implementation of the doll therapy develop many touching moments: they start to kiss the doll, to smile, to sing and, sometimes, they remember moments from the past with their own children. The elderly's reaction and behavior when getting into contact with the doll is documented on a special questionnaire. According to the results of the observation of the elderly's behavior is decided by the nurse and the psychologist whether or not to put into practice the doll therapy in the future.

Besides, another psychological method I got to know was the "Mini-Mental". Fundamentally, this is a test to measure the degree of dementia of the elderly and can be used only for elderly who do not suffer from Alzheimer's disease. Another trainee and I put through short interviews with elderly from other floors of the retirement home. The test consists of several little tasks which the elderly have to fulfill. While undertaking the test, it is important to maintain a calm and pleasant atmosphere in order to put the elderly's mind at rest. Particularly, when the elderly have difficulties to perform certain tasks this is a crucial aspect. Additionally, it is necessary to conclude the interview in a positive way aiming that the elderly consider the interview as an affirmatory experience.

Regarding my personal experiences, I truly appreciated this period of working with the elderly.

Especially, the daily contact with the elderly suffering from Alzheimer's disease was an exceptional experience and I enjoyed talking to and interacting with them. When talking to them in moments of disorientation and excitement, one really becomes part of their respective "world". Succeeding in these moments to calm or distract the elderly and, generally, making them smiling was a remarkable feeling.

Nonetheless, interacting with the elderly has been very challenging. In order to be able to respond properly to their respective behavior it was important to know about their life stories.

Considering the latter, I truly appreciated that certain aspects of the elderly's personal life were included in the several activities. For instance, one of the elderly living on the Alzheimer floor has been a pizza baker for a living. Therefore, we made all together pizza from the pastry prepared by him. These moments have a huge importance to the elderly and raise their quality of live. The way they started to interact when doing work they have always done was very fascinating.

In conclusion, I am very grateful that I had the opportunity to undertake my internship at the "ASP Lodovico Martelli". This experience promoted my desire to work with elderly in the future. Also, I gained further knowledge about the handling of elderly. Finally, I would like to thank the staff from the "ASP Lodovico Martelli" for the warm welcome and their support during the internship.

Annexe



Picture 1: a painted doorway



Picture 2: the circular construction of the Alzheimer Floor



Picture 3: a historical picture of Figline Valdarno (on the left) and the door of one of the sleeping rooms with pictures of the respective elderly (on the right)



Picture 4: the kitchen with traditional features



Picture 5: the dining table of some of the elderly



Picture 6: cooking activity



Picture 7: the doll therapy