

0972

Improving Social Participation for Ethnic Minority Elders in Long Term Care

Maureen Mickus, Sarah Marzano

Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, United States

Introduction: Demographic projections indicate that the number of minority elders within the U.S. will grow dramatically by 2030. Societal changes such as greater labor force participation among women and reduced fertility rates suggest minorities may need increased formal long term care support in the future. Few long term care facilities accommodate the cultural needs of minority residents, most notably in providing socialization opportunities for non-English speaking elders.

Objective: The purpose of this study was to provide non-English speaking elders in long term care facilities opportunities to engage in social participation. This research was also designed to educate international students about aging and long term care within the U.S.

Methods: International students from a midwestern university were matched with non-English speaking older adults in long term care facilities. The students participated in weekly visits with elders over a 15 week period. The study involved a mixed method approach, utilizing the World Health Organization Quality of Life (WHOQOL-OLD) scale, a tool specifically designed to measure quality of life among older adults and includes domains relating to social participation and intimacy. Additionally, qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews from both the elder and university student regarding the value of the visits. Students used weekly journals to reflect on their observations at the facility.

Results: Linking ethnic minority elders with young adults had a positive impact on improving social participation and overall quality of life for elders in long term care. Students indicated satisfaction with the experience, reporting increased knowledge of nursing homes and assisted living facilities.

Conclusion: Long term care providers should recognize the importance of accommodating the cultural needs of minority residents. Social visits may be particularly salient for residents with dementia. International students can benefit from community involvement and service learning.

Contribution: This research addresses the need for social participation with minority elders who may be isolated in long term care settings and have unaddressed needs due to communication barriers. Being able to communicate effectively in one's native language can be an important factor in enhancing one's quality of life.