



BACKGROUND/ LITERATURE REVIEW

Dementia affects over 55 million people worldwide and is increasing with aging populations (WHO, 2023). It impacts cognitive, emotional, and physical functioning, reducing participation and quality of life, particularly at end of life. Hospice care prioritizes comfort and dignity, where meaningful activity remains essential for identity and well-being. Despite this, dementia's unpredictable progression can limit hospice access, and occupational therapy remains underutilized, despite evidence supporting sensory-based interventions to reduce agitation and improve well-being.

Dementia Care Competency Framework

This project is grounded in the Dementia Care Competency Framework (2016), which emphasizes person-centered care, dignity, and quality of life. The framework supports individualized approaches and interdisciplinary collaboration, aligning closely with occupational therapy practice.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

Goal: The goal of this capstone project is to enhance the quality of life and occupational participation of individuals with dementia in hospice care by equipping caregivers and staff with evidence-based tools and strategies rooted in occupational therapy practice.

Interdisciplinary Team Observation: By the end of Week 3, I will shadow at least three interdisciplinary team members to gain insight into their approaches and roles, documenting key themes and observations in a reflective journal.

Needs Assessment: By the end of Week 4, I will conduct a needs assessment with at least five hospice staff members using structured surveys and informal interviews. I will analyze and summarize findings in a brief report.

Activities

- Shadow interdisciplinary team members
- Attend new staff training in Denver with Pathways' parent company
- Conduct needs assessment with staff and caregivers
- Develop deliverables and sensory-based intervention menu and toolkit
- Design training for staff/volunteers
- Complete training and collect feedback

Resource Guide Development: By the end of Week 10, I will develop dementia deliverables, and a sensory-based resource guide tailored to staff and caregiver needs, informed by OT best practices. I will collect feedback from at least three stakeholders and revise accordingly.

Staff/Volunteer Training: By the end of Week 14, I will design and deliver a 30-60-minute training session on deliverables and sensory-based dementia care for at least five hospice staff or volunteers, with pre/post surveys used to assess knowledge gained and perceptions of OT.

Moments that Matter

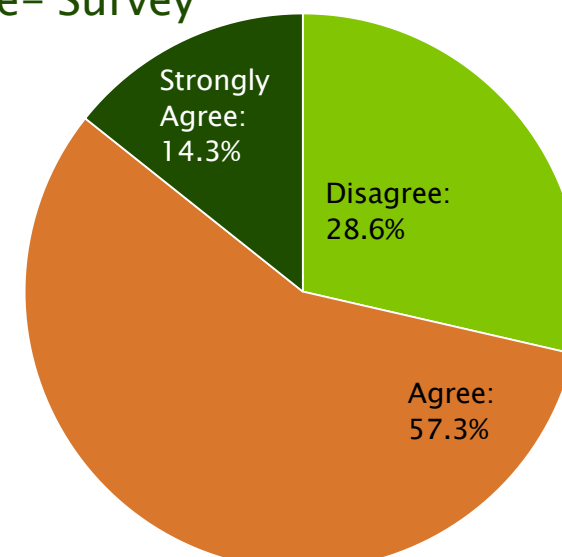
Enhancing End-of-Life Dementia Care Through Occupation and Sensory Connection

OUTCOME EVALUATION

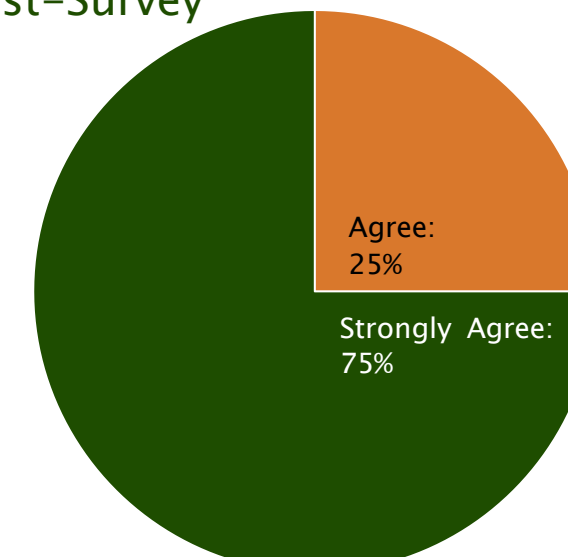
- Used both formative and summative evaluation strategies to monitor progress and ensure project effectiveness
- Collected early qualitative data through informal interviews and discussions with hospice staff
- Conducted a formal needs assessment identifying gaps in knowledge, resources, and staff confidence in dementia EOL care
- Revised project goals to broaden scope beyond sensory-based interventions to include occupation-based supports
- Developed five key deliverables: caregiver handouts, communication boards, environmental modification recommendations, dementia activity kits, and sensory intervention handbooks
- Incorporated ongoing feedback from hospice staff and interdisciplinary team members
- Made iterative revisions to improve usability and better align with clinical needs

FINDINGS

Pre-Survey



Post-Survey



Pre- and post-training surveys were conducted to assess changes in hospice staff's knowledge, confidence, and understanding of occupational therapy (OT) in dementia end-of-life care. Participants responded to statements, such as

"I understand the potential role of occupational therapy in supporting individuals with dementia at end of life."

Key findings include:

- Increased confidence among staff in supporting patients with dementia.
- Notable improvements in use of non-pharmacological, sensory-based interventions.
- Demonstrated effectiveness of the capstone project, presentation, and resources.
- Highlighted the value of OT in promoting comfort, dignity, and quality of care.

These results underscore the importance of integrating occupational therapy into hospice care to enhance patient-centered support at the end of life.

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Community Partner: Pathways Hospice

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This capstone project developed five practical resources for dementia end-of-life care, including caregiver handouts, communication boards, environmental checklists, activity kits, and sensory intervention guides. These tools improved hospice staff understanding of occupational therapy's role and increased confidence in using occupation-based, non-pharmacological approaches to support communication, engagement, and environmental needs.

Future students can build on this work by updating materials with new evidence-based practices or expanding resources to meet diverse patient needs, including the development of digital tools or training supports. The project is designed to remain adaptable for ongoing improvement.

Importantly, all materials have been uploaded to the organization's online database of resources, ensuring easy and ongoing access for hospice staff. This allows interdisciplinary team members to consistently utilize and integrate the tools into daily care practices, supporting sustainability and long-term use.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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REFERENCES

