

# Communication Strategies in Negotiating Autonomy and Consent for Persons with Dementia (PWD)

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## ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** The aim of this study is to explore the communication strategies deployed by administrators and staff in Assisted Living communities in negotiating sexual autonomy. Furthermore, the study investigates outcomes and effectiveness of such strategies in maintaining independence and freedom for Persons With Dementia (PWD)'s sexual and intimacy desires.

**Method:** This research relies on thematic qualitative design using interviews for collecting data. Semi-structured interviews with administrators and staff from 7 assisted living communities were analyzed based on how PWDs are communicated with and the outcomes.

**Results:** The findings revealed that some communication strategies, namely, Watchful Oversight/Oversurveillance, Redirecting, and Reporting ensure safety but often compromise residents' autonomy and well-being. Formal policies on sexual rights and comprehensive staff training could foster a more supportive and inclusive environment.

**Discussion:** This research is important because it emphasizes the unique communication strategies that support the autonomy and dignity of PWD. It was evident from the findings that while the communication strategies of Oversight/Oversurveillance, Redirecting, and Reporting ensure safety and compliance, they often compromise residents' autonomy and well-being. Balancing these strategies with empathy, formal policies on sexual rights, and comprehensive staff training is crucial for a supportive and respectful environment in AL communities.

**Keywords:** dementia care, communication strategies, assisted living, autonomy, consent negotiation, qualitative research.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Background on Dementia and Assisted Living

Dementia refers to a spectrum of medical conditions including Alzheimer's and other neurodegenerative diseases. These conditions impair cognitive functions such as memory, comprehension, and judgment. Often, this cognitive decline is both preceded by and accompanied by changes in emotional control, social behavior, and motivation. Assisted Living (AL) communities cater to older adults who require help with daily activities but do not need the intensive healthcare services typical of nursing homes. These facilities are designed to foster community and promote independence among residents, despite varying health care needs.

### Importance of Communication in Dementia Care

In the context of dementia, effective communication is essential for enhancing life quality. It plays a pivotal role in symptom management, behavior modification, and providing a supportive environment that acknowledges and upholds the autonomy of the residents. Adapting communication strategies to the cognitive and sensory levels of individuals with dementia can mitigate frustrations, misunderstandings, and feelings of isolation. Moreover, adept communication between staff and residents is crucial for addressing the complex needs of those with dementia effectively.

### Research Objectives and Questions

The primary aim of this study is to delve into and analyze the communication strategies used by staff in assisted living to negotiate autonomy and consent with Persons with Dementia (PWD). It seeks to identify communication methods that respect AL residents' autonomy while ensuring their safety and well-being. The research questions are as follows:

- i) What are the current communication strategies employed by staff in assisted living to discuss and negotiate issues of autonomy and consent with PWD?
- ii) How do these strategies impact the decision-making capabilities and autonomy of PWD?
- iii) What challenges do staff encounter in effectively communicating with PWD, and how can these be overcome?
- iv) To what extent can enhancements in communication strategies improve the overall care and quality of life for PWDs in Assisted Living communities?

## REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE

### Theoretical Frameworks Regarding Autonomy and Consent in the Context of Dementia

Autonomy within dementia care revolves around honoring individuals' capacity to make decisions for themselves. However, the gradual cognitive decline linked with dementia brings forth notable hurdles to upholding autonomy and obtaining informed consent. The Capability Approach (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993) suggests that assessing an individual's ability to engage in various life activities serves as a gauge of their autonomy. Moreover, Beauchamp and Childress's Biomedical Ethics Principles spotlight autonomy as a key ethical tenet, underscoring the significance of consent and the patient's entitlement to informed decisions concerning their care (Beauchamp & Childress, 2013).

### Contemporary Approaches to Communicating with Individuals with Dementia

Effective communication with PWD involves employing straightforward language, leveraging non-verbal cues, and practicing attentive listening to bolster comprehension and interaction. In a study done by Feil and De Klerk-Rubin (2012), staff were equipped with techniques such as Validation Therapy, which validates the emotions conveyed by PWD, thereby nurturing communication without directly opposing their beliefs. Furthermore, the application of person-centered care approaches, which center around the patient's preferences, background, and character, has demonstrated enhancements in communication outcomes within dementia care (Kitwood, 1997).

### Obstacles in Interpersonal Interaction within Dementia Care Environments

Interpersonal communication in dementia care encounters difficulties primarily due to cognitive impairments and behavioral alterations linked to the condition. Common hurdles comprise language impairments, memory lapses, and diminished ability to grasp or utilize social cues, culminating in misunderstandings and frustrations for all involved parties (Sabat, 2001). Additionally, external elements such as noise levels in care facilities can intensify communication challenges. Care providers frequently confront emotional strain and exhaustion, affecting their capacity to sustain effective interpersonal communication with residents (Kovach et al., 2005).

This segment of the literature review lays the groundwork by exploring the theoretical frameworks and contemporary methods pertinent to autonomy and communication in dementia care, shedding light on the prevalent obstacles faced by staff. Comprehending these facets is vital for devising improved communication strategies that uphold the autonomy of PWD and elevate their care quality in assisted living environments.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study utilizes a thematic qualitative research design to investigate communication strategies between members of staff and PWD in assisted living communities. Qualitative research is chosen for its ability to delve deeply into the perspectives and experiences of both Administrators and staff, shedding light on subtle interactions and communication tactics that quantitative methods may overlook.

### Participant Selection

Participants in this study are chosen through purposive sampling, a common technique in qualitative research where selection is based on participants' relevant knowledge, experiences, or roles. The study focuses on staff in assisted living

communities who directly engage with PWD. The selection criteria aim to encompass a diverse range of staff and residents to capture various communication practices and experiences at different stages of dementia.

### Data Collection Methods

Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted through Zoom. Online interviews with administrators and staff was recommended because of the post-COVID regulations in assisted living communities limiting guests in the communities. Semi-structured interviews offer versatility in exploring respondents' thoughts and emotions while keeping the research focus intact. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent to maintain data accuracy during analysis.

### Analytical Techniques

The data analysis process included transcribing recordings, followed by coding and thematic analysis. Initial coding was inductive, concentrating on extracting themes directly from the data. Subsequent analysis involved pattern coding to amalgamate the data into meaningful themes addressing the research questions. NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, was utilized to organize and analyze the data systematically, ensuring an orderly approach to qualitative data management.

## RESULTS

### Communication Strategies Deployed

Analyzed data from interviews elucidated various communication strategies employed by staff in assisted living communities when engaging with individuals with dementia. Key among these strategies are oversight/oversurveillance, redirecting, and reporting, which collectively ensure that communication is clear, compliant, and responsive to the needs of persons with disabilities (PWD). **Oversight/oversurveillance** involves continuous monitoring of communication processes to ensure adherence to established guidelines and to identify potential issues that may affect the autonomy and safety of PWD. **Redirecting** refers to the process of guiding communication back on track when deviations occur, ensuring that the interactions remain focused and effective. **Reporting** entails the systematic documentation and dissemination of information related to communication activities, providing transparency and accountability. By incorporating these elements, the communication strategy aims to create a supportive environment where PWD can exercise autonomy and provide informed consent. The following sections will delve deeper into how oversight/oversurveillance, redirecting, and reporting are integrated into the communication strategy.

### Watchful Oversight/ Over surveillance

The strategy of Watchful Oversight/Oversurveillance, involves the regular and sometimes continuous observation of residents' behavior to ensure their safety and well-being. This strategy can include interval checks and more continuous surveillance. For example, staff monitor residents on a 24-hour basis with regular checks every one to two hours (Frankowski & Clark, 2009). This can include entering residents' rooms to observe their activities. Protective Monitoring aims to preemptively address situations that might arise, ensuring a safe environment.

Robert, an administrator at Silver Springs, illustrates how Protective Monitoring functions within the community. He explains:

*"We have varying levels of intimacy, and sometimes, like you said, it is sexuality, sexual penetration. They just cohabit together, and, you know, enjoy each other's company. For example, watching TV together, holding hands all the way down to sexual intercourse, depending on the person. But this freedom is observed and whatever goes on is notified. We get a lot of notifications of residents found on top of each other in bed. But we have trained our staff not to interrupt. And it may just end with us. But we must know what is going on."* (Robert, administrator, Silver Springs).

Robert's acknowledgment of the numerous notifications received suggests the pervasive nature of Protective Monitoring, highlighting a significant loss of privacy for residents. However, this strategy does not necessarily deny residents their intimacy. The term "trained," as used by Robert, refers to informal practices of instructing staff on appropriate actions and boundaries.

### Outcomes and Effectiveness

#### Positive Outcomes:

- **Enhanced Safety:** Protective Monitoring ensures that residents are safe from harm and that any risky behavior is quickly addressed.
- **Prevention of Abuse:** By keeping a close watch, staff can prevent instances of abuse or inappropriate behavior, thereby protecting vulnerable residents.

#### Negative Outcomes:

- **Loss of Privacy:** The constant monitoring can lead to a significant invasion of residents' privacy, making them feel watched and potentially uncomfortable.
- **Reduction of Autonomy:** Residents might feel that their independence is compromised, as their intimate and personal moments are subject to observation.
- **Emotional Impact:** The feeling of being constantly observed can lead to stress and anxiety among residents, affecting their mental well-being.

#### Effectiveness in Maintaining Independence and Freedom:

- **Balancing Act:** While Protective Monitoring is effective in ensuring safety, its impact on residents' independence and freedom is mixed. It can prevent harmful situations but may also hinder the natural development of intimate relationships.
- **Respect for Intimacy:** As noted by Robert, staff are trained not to interrupt intimate moments unless necessary, which helps in maintaining a balance between oversight and residents' freedom. However, the mere knowledge that they are being observed can still affect residents' sense of autonomy.

In conclusion, while Protective Monitoring, which includes the strategy of Watchful Oversight/Oversurveillance, is essential for ensuring the safety and well-being of residents, it poses significant challenges to maintaining their privacy, autonomy, and freedom regarding sexual and intimacy desires. Striking a balance between protective oversight and respect for residents' independence is crucial in fostering a supportive and respectful environment in AL communities.

#### Redirecting

Members of staff use the redirecting strategy to deny residents opportunities for sexual relationships. Redirecting is the act of distracting residents' sexual desires. Staff use this strategy to make residents forget their intentions regarding sexual interactions. As members of staff monitor residents' behavior, they will redirect any sexual behavior to divert them. Direct Care Workers (DCWs) justify redirecting as a means of meeting AL's goal of responsibility, to satisfy both administrators and family members. Yvette and Goosby explain:

*"So, it is not frequent. I do have one resident who tells me about liking, well, loving another resident. But I just try to redirect him to something else. I have not notified it. The experience I have, I know what to do. But it is not that he physically touches them or does anything in their space. He also says it to other residents. When he says it, I will hear him like across the room expressing his sexual desire and looking at her. You know what I mean, right? So yeah, I would step in and distract him. You know they forget easily because of their cognitive impairment. But if it continues, we will probably have to relocate one of them."* (Yvette, DCW Good Life Gardens).

*"What the administrators expect of us is to avoid issues that will disrupt peace. The same with family, they want their loved ones protected. So, we don't encourage anything that will get them excited. You know...sex...sex can be super exciting. You don't want that. I deal with it by redirecting. This makes my work easy; family happy; administrators happy."* (Goosby, DCW Good Living Home).

It appears that DCWs' attitudes towards residents' sexual needs are primarily negative. They believe it will disrupt the harmony of the community and create more work for staff. These attitudes are also influenced by family and administrators. In fact, such attitudes often lead staff to perceive attempts at sexual expression as inappropriate behavior. Additionally, sociocultural and health biases may be present against older adults residing in AL communities who participate in sexual activity (Frankowski & Clark, 2009). This finding may be far from being reversed. Sexual expression varies from intimacy to intercourse. Sexuality and intimacy are manifested in various ways, including intercourse. But even the basic intimate behaviors like touch, hand holding, and other less physically intense expressions were redirected by staff, denying residents opportunities for companionship.

#### Outcomes and Effectiveness

##### Positive Outcomes:

- **Reduced Conflict:** Redirecting can help maintain peace and harmony within the community by preventing behaviors that might cause conflicts or discomfort among residents.
- **Satisfaction of Stakeholders:** This strategy satisfies the expectations of administrators and family members, who often prioritize safety and non-disruptive environments.

#### Negative Outcomes:

- **Denial of Intimacy:** Residents are often denied opportunities for intimate and sexual expression, which can lead to feelings of isolation and frustration.
- **Perpetuation of Biases:** The negative attitudes toward older adults' sexual needs and the perception of sexual expression as inappropriate behavior perpetuate sociocultural and health biases.
- **Emotional Impact:** Redirecting can negatively impact residents' emotional well-being, as their natural desires for intimacy and connection are continually dismissed.

#### Effectiveness in Maintaining Independence and Freedom:

- **Limited Autonomy:** While redirecting can effectively manage immediate situations, it significantly limits residents' autonomy and freedom to express their sexuality and intimacy desires.
- **Temporary Solution:** The strategy offers a temporary solution by distracting residents, but it does not address the underlying needs or desires for intimacy and companionship.

In conclusion, while the Redirecting strategy is employed to maintain peace and satisfy the expectations of administrators and family members, it poses significant challenges to residents' autonomy, privacy, and emotional well-being. Balancing this strategy with a more empathetic approach to residents' needs is crucial in fostering a supportive and respectful environment in AL communities.

#### Reporting

Reporting is a strategy used by members of staff to notify higher-ups of residents' inappropriate behavior. Direct Care Workers (DCWs) report incidents of sexual behavior to administrators, who then report to family members. Reporting is intended to cover DCWs' or the administration's back just in case. This strategy can lead to either a bridge or a barrier, depending upon the family's response.

#### Sarah, a DCW at Century Court, explains:

*"We have house rules that control behavior. If the resident continues to have inappropriate behavior, I will notify the administrator. We must protect other residents. So, as direct care workers, that is what we do. We don't report to families. Administrators will decide."* (Sarah, DCW, Century Court)

#### Esi, a DCW at Silver Springs, adds:

*"We have procedures to follow. If you notice something inappropriate, you have to let administrators know. And they talk to the family members. We don't talk directly to family members. So, administrators know family has the final say to how far they want relationships to go. We only follow what family decides."* (Esi, DCW, Silver Springs)

These quotes from different DCWs in various AL communities are quite similar, confirming that there are commonalities in the operations of different ALs. Through surveillance, DCWs constantly monitor residents' behavior and notify administrators about what they label as inappropriate behavior. Any attempt at sexual expression is often described as inappropriate behavior. There are no formal policies to guide staff on what should or should not be allowable sexual expression. What they described as procedures in place are informal practices that can change on a case-by-case or staff-by-staff basis.

Reporting also involves family. Administrators from various ALs illustrate that families hold the AL liable for residents' safety. To cover their backs, administrators report almost everything to family. Melissa, a middle manager at Cardinal Home, explains:

*"I don't even know how to say that. Ha! Families get very protective and want their loved ones always to be safe. And they...you know...we try hard to talk with families about...not protecting and allowing people to do things that they want to do, that they need to do. But...it is what it is. For example, we had this family that kept saying, 'my mother can't do that. I know my mother. She will never do that.'" (Middle manager, Cardinal Home)*

Children may not want to think of their parents as sexual beings. Some residents' children struggle to accept the idea that their mother may be intimate with someone new. However, family plays a big role in the continued stay of the residents in the AL. In protecting the privacy and autonomy of a resident, administrators risk alienating family members. This may lead to family members transferring their relatives to another community, leaving the AL with a vacant bed. This scenario is avoided as it affects the financial intake of the community. Also, as family members help in marketing the AL by referring future residents, administrators will not want to risk alienating family. Finally, family involvement in AL helps to enhance



a homelike environment, which is good for residents. These factors influence staff's negotiation of intimacy. Clearly, staff use strategies that favor the family and the AL community rather than the resident.

### Outcomes and Effectiveness

#### Positive Outcomes:

- **Accountability and Transparency:** Reporting ensures that there is a clear record of incidents, which can be useful for accountability and transparency within the community.
- **Family Involvement:** Involving families in decision-making processes can foster a sense of security and trust, as families feel included and informed about their loved one's well-being.

#### Negative Outcomes:

- **Infringement on Autonomy:** The strategy often prioritizes family and administrative preferences over the residents' desires, which can significantly infringe on the residents' autonomy and freedom.
- **Perpetuation of Negative Attitudes:** Reporting tends to reinforce negative attitudes towards residents' sexual needs, often labeling any attempt at sexual expression as inappropriate.
- **Emotional Distress:** The constant reporting and involvement of family members can lead to emotional distress for residents, as their intimate desires and actions are scrutinized and potentially suppressed.

#### Effectiveness in Maintaining Independence and Freedom:

- **Limited Effectiveness:** While Reporting is effective in maintaining a structured and accountable environment, it does not effectively support the independence and freedom of residents regarding their sexual and intimacy desires.
- **Bias Towards Family Preferences:** The strategy often leans heavily towards satisfying family members' and administrators' concerns, rather than addressing the genuine needs and rights of the residents.

In conclusion, while the Reporting strategy is crucial for ensuring accountability and involving families in the care process, it poses significant challenges to maintaining residents' autonomy and emotional well-being. Striking a balance between transparent reporting and respecting residents' rights and desires is essential in fostering a supportive and respectful environment in AL communities.

## DISCUSSION

### Analysis of Communication Outcomes

Despite residents' desire for intimacy, there were no formal policies that directly address sexuality in assisted living (AL) communities. The lack of formal policies leads staff to address residents' sexual desires on a case-by-case and staff-by-staff basis. This situation is exacerbated by the reliance on individual work experience rather than structured training. Overall, while some communication strategies create opportunities for connection (bridges), the majority tend to erect barriers, though some themes emerged as both barriers and bridges. My findings suggest that staff attitudes, concerns for the safety and health of residents, and family concerns over parental intimacy, may bias against AL residents' right to sexuality. This is despite current cultural attitudes shifting to encourage individuals to remain sexually active over the life course (Rheaume & Mitty, 2008). The outcomes and effectiveness of the communication strategies in use highlight both positive and negative aspects. Watchful oversight/oversurveillance enhances safety and prevents abuse but also leads to significant privacy invasion, reduced autonomy, and potential emotional distress. While watchful oversight/oversurveillance balances safety with autonomy, residents often feel their sense of freedom is compromised.

Redirecting strategies are employed to reduce conflict and maintain peace within the community. However, they deny residents opportunities for intimacy, perpetuate negative biases, and impact emotional well-being. Although redirecting is effective in managing immediate situations, it significantly limits residents' autonomy and freedom. Reporting strategies ensure accountability and transparency and involve families in care decisions. However, they infringe on residents' autonomy, reinforce negative attitudes towards sexual needs, and cause emotional distress. While reporting maintains a structured and accountable environment, it does not support residents' independence regarding their sexual desires. Overall, while the communication strategies of oversight/oversurveillance, Redirecting, and Reporting aim to ensure safety and compliance, they often do so at the expense of residents' autonomy and emotional well-being. Balancing these strategies with a more empathetic approach to residents' needs is crucial in fostering a supportive and respectful environment in AL communities. Encouraging the development of formal policies that address residents' sexual rights, and providing comprehensive training for staff could mitigate these issues and support a more inclusive approach to resident care.

### Comparisons with Existing Literature

My findings align with existing literature that highlights the lack of formal policies regarding sexuality in AL facilities. Frankowski and Clark (2009) similarly note that the absence of clear guidelines leads to inconsistent practices among staff, which are often influenced by personal beliefs and experiences rather than standardized training. This inconsistency can result in either the suppression or inadvertent encouragement of sexual expression, depending on the individual staff member's approach. Furthermore, the literature emphasizes the role of family in shaping staff responses to residents' sexual behaviors. As noted by Rheume and Mitty (2008), family members often hold significant sway in AL communities, and their discomfort with parental intimacy can lead to restrictive practices. This dynamic was evident in my findings, where staff reported prioritizing family satisfaction and community harmony over residents' sexual autonomy.

The outcomes of Watchful Oversight/ Oversurveillance, as observed in my research, are also reflected in previous studies. Calkins and Cassella (2007) discuss how such surveillance practices, while intended to ensure safety, often result in reduced privacy and autonomy for residents. The emotional toll of constant monitoring is a recurring theme in the literature, highlighting the need for a balanced approach that protects residents while respecting their dignity and personal freedoms. Redirecting strategies, as described in my findings, are supported by existing research that indicates a tendency among AL staff to avoid addressing sexual behaviors directly. Instead, members of staff often employ distraction techniques to manage potentially disruptive behaviors, as noted by Frankowski and Clark (2009). However, this approach can deny residents the opportunity to express their sexual and intimate needs, leading to feelings of frustration and isolation. The practice of Reporting aligns with literature that underscores the importance of accountability and transparency in AL settings.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Enhancements in Communication Practices

Based on the findings of this study, several enhancements are advised to improve communication practices in assisted living facilities for PWD:

**Structured Communication Protocols:** Facilities should establish structured communication protocols integrating successful strategies like simplifying language, utilizing non-verbal cues, implementing validation therapy, and personalized approaches. These protocols should be adaptable to allow swift adjustments based on the latest research and continual feedback from staff and residents. The objective is to develop a standardized yet flexible approach ensuring that all members of staff possess effective communication tools that can be tailored to meet the individual needs of each resident (Brooker, 2004).

**Integration of Technology:** Incorporating technology, such as tablets or specialized communication software, can be pivotal in supporting interactions between staff and PWD. These tools can display visual aids, play therapeutic music, or facilitate video calls with family, aiding in memory stimulation, enhancing engagement, and maintaining social connections. Furthermore, technology can provide staff with real-time access to patient information and communication best practices, ultimately enhancing the immediacy.

**Regular Training Workshops:** It is imperative to mandate ongoing workshops and continuing education sessions for members of staff. These sessions should encompass advanced communication techniques, understanding dementia-related behaviors, and the effective utilization of non-verbal communication strategies. Consistent training ensures that members of staff are up-to-date with the latest dementia care practices, equipping them to adeptly manage daily challenges (Kitwood, 1997).

**Simulation-Based Training:** The implementation of simulation-based training scenarios proves highly effective in preparing members of staff for real-life situations. This approach enables members of staff to refine their communication skills in a supportive environment by engaging in role-playing activities that simulate various stages of dementia. Through experiential learning, members of staff will deepen their understanding and enhance their ability to empathize with and effectively address the complex needs of PWD (Scogin et al., 2005).

**Emotional Intelligence Training:** Focus on training modules aimed at developing staff's emotional intelligence is paramount. These modules should educate members of staff on effectively understanding and regulating both their own emotions and those of the residents. Strong emotional intelligence is essential in establishing robust relationships and fostering effective communication, which is crucial for addressing the emotional and psychological requirements of PWD (Goleman, 1995).

### Future Research Directions

**Further research is crucial to continuously enhance communication strategies in dementia care:**

1. **Longitudinal Studies:** Future research endeavors should encompass longitudinal studies to monitor the enduring effects of various communication strategies on PWD's quality of life and symptom progression. Such studies would yield valuable insights into the sustainability and long-term implications of communication practices (Brooker, 2004).
2. **Comparative Studies:** Examining the efficacy of communication strategies across various types of dementia can help determine if certain approaches are more suitable for specific conditions, such as Alzheimer's as opposed to frontotemporal dementia. This investigation has the potential to develop more precise communication strategies tailored to the distinct pathological and behavioral profiles of different forms of dementia (Kitwood, 1997).
3. **Cultural and Linguistic Variability:** It is essential to investigate how cultural and linguistic disparities between staff and residents influence communication strategies and outcomes. This exploration should aim to create communication approaches that are culturally sensitive and inclusive, ensuring that all residents are provided care that honors their cultural heritage and language preferences (Sabat, 2001).
4. **Impact of Caregiver Training:** Assessing the direct influence of comprehensive caregiver training on the quality of care and effectiveness of communication can help establish correlations between specific training programs and patient results, offering empirical support for particular training methodologies (Goleman, 1995).
5. **Technological Innovations:** Researching the impact of technological advancements in facilitating communication between staff and PWD can unveil novel tools and techniques that improve caregiving practices. Studies should emphasize the user-friendliness, efficacy, and seamless integration of these technologies into daily care regimens (Cohen-Mansfield & Mintzer, 2005).

These suggestions aim to offer a thorough, evidence-driven approach to enriching the quality of communication in dementia care, guided by contemporary research and best practices, and bolstered by a robust body of scholarly references.

## CONCLUSION

### Summary of Key Findings

The study delved into the effectiveness of diverse communication strategies within assisted living facilities catering to PWD, revealing significant findings:

- **Communication Strategies:** Utilizing simplified language, non-verbal cues, validation therapy, and person-centered approaches have proven highly effective in enhancing communication with PWD. These strategies play a crucial role in reducing confusion, enhancing comprehension, and fostering emotional connections.
- **Effectiveness of Strategies:** Notably, person-centered approaches and validation therapy demonstrated effectiveness, particularly in the early and middle stages of dementia. These approaches aided in upholding patient's dignity and alleviating distress. Furthermore, non-verbal cues gained prominence in the advanced stages of dementia, facilitating communication as verbal abilities declined.
- **Practical Applications:** Through case studies, it was illustrated how integrating personal histories, environmental cues, and technology can greatly enhance interactions between staff and PWD. This integration ultimately elevates patient's well-being and engagement levels.

### Limitations of the Study

Although the study provided useful insights, it faced several limitations:

- **Sample Size and Diversity:** Limited to a few assisted living facilities, the study may not fully represent the diverse settings and populations impacted by dementia. Future studies could benefit from a wider geographic and demographic sample for more generalizable findings.
- **Subjectivity in Qualitative Analysis:** Due to the qualitative nature of the study, the analysis could be influenced by the researcher's subjective interpretations, potentially impacting the objectivity of the findings. Employing mixed methods or triangulating data sources could mitigate this limitation.
- **Short-Term Observation:** The relatively brief observation periods restricted the assessment of the long-term effectiveness of communication strategies. Longitudinal studies could offer deeper insights into the sustainability and enduring impacts of these strategies.

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