Implementing the Namaste Care programme for people with advanced dementia at the end of their lives: an action research study in six care homes with nursing

Executive summary

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Executive summary

This report describes an action research study implementing the Namaste Care programme in six South London care homes.

Namaste Care is a structured care programme integrating compassionate nursing care with individualised, meaningful activities for people with advanced dementia at the end of their lives. Care staff, managers and relatives judged that the Namaste Care Programme had a positive impact on the quality of life of residents with advanced dementia, and on relationships within the care homes. Families are supported to acknowledge the progression of dementia in the positive context of seeking to provide quality of life to the end of life.

No additional staff or significant expenditures were needed.

Background

Most people with advanced dementia in the UK live and die in care homes. In the later stages of dementia, people are profoundly physically and cognitively disabled and their psychological well-being is threatened by loneliness, boredom and helplessness. A care home resident may typically spend only two minutes interacting with care staff or other residents over a six hour period, not including interaction with staff during care.

The Namaste Care programme

‘Namaste’ is the Indian greeting meaning ‘to honour the spirit within’ and reflects the values of person-centred, relationship-based care that underpin best practice dementia care.

The Namaste Care programme seeks to engage people with advanced dementia through sensory input, especially touch, and to enrich their quality of life. The programme runs seven days a week and requires commitment from the entire care home team to change their routines and focus on meeting the psycho-social and spiritual needs of their residents with advanced dementia.

Namaste residents are brought together into a dedicated space which is transformed to create a calm, welcoming ambience: soft music playing, use of scents, flowers etc. During the session the Namaste Care worker works one to one with each resident, offering gentle interventions such as washing hands/face and applying moisturising cream, while making eye contact and talking affirmatively to the resident. Families are encouraged to participate in the Namaste Care programme, sharing care staff’s efforts to connect with the person they care for and find ways to give pleasure and comfort.

The context of the care homes

Corporate, not-for-profit, and family owned care homes, along with NHS Specialist Care Units, were selected to reflect the diversity of care provision. The care homes varied in size, in the ethnic diversity among staff and residents, and in their staffing ratios. Residents included people with long term mental health problems as well as advanced dementia. Every participating care home experienced a change of management, or significant disruption, during the study.

“And I felt a sense of “Oh, where am I... this is lovely!” You know what I mean? It really hit me as I walked through the door – that is how quick it hit me. The feeling of relaxation and everyone is quiet... these are the people who are usually outside and usually standing up shouting – there’s one singing. They were all quiet.”
Relative – daughter CH E

“You look forward to that hour to go when you going to have a nice calm atmosphere, you relax. You do things with the residents, you know, you enjoy the way they look, the happiness on their face, the smile when they get their one to one. So in a way it gives you satisfaction knowing that you’re doing something they enjoy as well.”
Care worker – CH B

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The study

Managers and staff from six care homes attended a workshop introducing the Namaste Care programme; a day of education in the care home; and a day of role modelling Namaste Care. The Namaste Care programme was then implemented by each care home, supported by the nurse researcher. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected before, during and after the programme from residents, care staff, managers and relatives.

Results and findings

37 residents were recruited to the study. In care homes with good pain management, Namaste Care was significantly effective in reducing behavioural symptom severity over time. The overall decrease in the severity of behavioural symptoms during Namaste Care was not related to increased analgesia. There was no evidence that Namaste Care caused harm.

Benefits for residents

Residents taking part in the Namaste Care programme:

• enjoyed different elements of the care programme, massage, music, birdsong, lifelike dolls or animals, food treats etc.
• were stimulated to be more alert and responsive, and engaged more actively with others (e.g. more eye contact and attempts to talk)
• relaxed and became less agitated as they experienced a calmer atmosphere and approach to care
• had regular, structured, one-to-one time with a care worker and were offered therapeutic touch and the opportunity to communicate and express emotion
• experienced an overall reduction in the severity of behavioural symptoms which was sustained over time.

Benefits for care staff

Care staff found that the Namaste Care programme:

• helped them connect and communicate with residents and meet their human needs

• gave permission for more intuitive care
• encouraged them to be creative in developing the programme for individual residents
• fostered easier, closer relationships with relatives
• was enjoyable and rewarding, and increased their confidence and self esteem.

Benefits for relatives

Families and friends:

• felt the atmosphere in the care homes became calmer and more homely
• experienced closer connection and communication with their family member
• some felt Namaste Care had a positive impact on their own quality of life
• expressed appreciation of the skill and commitment of care staff
• perceived benefits for their relatives and welcomed the special attention given during the Namaste Care programme.

“Seeing the physical evidence myself and how residents who are normally so restless and agitated, when they are put in the Namaste room and given the programme, they are so calm... I mean it really touches my heart. So in one way, yes, it has changed my way of working.”
Manager - CH D

“But I would hate to think that [Namaste] was stopping because his day would be... barren. Television means nothing to him... I’ve spent the last eight years interpreting things. So my interpretation is valid now and I believe for my [name of husband], this is like a salvation, nothing else.”
Relative - wife CH E

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Benefits for care home managers

Care home managers found that the Namaste Care programme fulfilled many of their objectives. The care programme:

- inspired care staff and improved teamwork throughout the care home
- offered an alternative structure for care delivery which had a positive impact on the atmosphere of the care home
- gave practical guidance to encourage staff to provide respectful, compassionate, person-centred care
- improved relationships and communication between care staff and relatives
- created a positive framework for end of life care conversations.

Conclusions

The South London care homes participating in this study found the Namaste Care programme practical and acceptable; it was welcomed and enjoyed by residents, care staff and relatives. Where there was strong leadership and good nursing and medical care, the Namaste Care programme significantly improved the quality of life of residents with advanced dementia. The Namaste Care programme stimulated care homes to give more compassionate and dignified care to older people with advanced dementia at the end of life, and has the potential to transform care throughout the sector.

“The biggest thing Namaste has given me is a different focus when visiting mum. For many years now mum hasn’t been able to communicate with us and conversation has been one sided which is difficult and at times she appeared to barely realise I was there. I now know to do other things as well as talk to mum like show her old photos, brush her hair, feed her treats, and moisturise her face and hands. This makes spending time with her easier and I feel I’m making more of a connection with her and a difference in her life.”

Email from relative – daughter CH D

“I think it has completely changed the way we approach care now. I think it has made my job easier because I had a vision of, you know, you have a vision of what you want in the home and what you want for your residents. Namaste has packaged that into a programme which has allowed me to get things across to the staff in a way they can understand.”

Manager – CH C

If you would like to see a full copy of the research report, please email Min Stacpoole at m.stacpoole@stchristophers.org.uk