

## **Reminiscence as therapy**

It is commonly assumed and taken as self-evident that 'reminiscing' is in some way beneficial for older people and therefore can be used in a 'therapeutic' way.

A number of recent studies have tried to demonstrate these effects and to measure the effectiveness of reminiscence therapy as a method of improving the life of older people in care (e.g. Hsieh and Wang 2003, Lin *et al* 2003, Woods *et al* 2009). Researchers have investigated the effect of reminiscence therapy on various cognitive, psychological, social, behavioural, and health outcome measures. These include depression, self-esteem, coping self-efficacy, social behaviour and integration, life-satisfaction and general well being.

The studies have used a standard care control group or a placebo control group against which the effects of reminiscence can be measured using a variety of clinical outcome indicators (such as standardised psychometric measures).

The results clearly indicate that reminiscence therapy has a significantly positive impact on older people, particularly regarding depression and cognition, improving mood and increasing general well-being. The impact is particularly noticeable where patients had the opportunity for self-expression and could control the recall process (and therefore could choose what aspects of their lives they wanted to emphasise). An important benefit of reminiscence identified by one study (O'Leary and Barry 1998, 161) was lower mortality.

The studies have also revealed that there can also be significant improvements in staff knowledge regarding residents and in staff stress levels (Woods *et al* 2009, 10).

Hsieh, H-F and Wang, J-J., 2003. Effect of reminiscence therapy on depression in older adults: a systematic review, in *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 40 (2003), 335-345.

Lin, Y-C, Dai, Y-T and Hwang, L-S., 2003. The effect of reminiscence on the elderly population: a systematic review, in *Public Health Nursing* 20 (4), 297-306.

O'Leary, E. and Barry, N., 1998. Reminiscence therapy with older adults, in *Journal of Social Work Practice* 12 (2), 159-65.

Woods, B, Spector, A.E., Jones C.A., Orrell, M., 2009. Reminiscence therapy for dementia (review), *The Cochrane Collaboration*. John Wiley and Sons.

**Mark Curteis**

**Heritage Learning and Access Officer**