

on how they would not be given a choice – there were 39 females and 8 males in the experimental group and 35 females and 9 males in the control group.

4th floor residents were given the opportunity to select a small plant and care for it themselves (all chose a plant); they were given a choice of movie night rather than have it scheduled for them. Residents were consulted about any changes arising from complaints.

By contrast, it was emphasised to 2nd floor residents that the staff made almost all the decisions for them. The nurses would water and care for the plants. Residents would be informed when they were scheduled to see the movie. Staff would announce decisions rather than discuss them.

Questionnaires were designed to assess the effects of increased responsibility and choice on the residents. The first questionnaire was completed by the residents who were asked to rate themselves on an 8 point scale (8 total control) to assess how happy and in control they felt. This questionnaire was administered a week before the talks.

Three weeks later, a second questionnaire was completed by nurses who worked on both floors used in the experiment. All nurses were unaware of the experiment's hypothesis (double blind procedure), and they rated resident's happiness, alertness, dependency, sociability and activity levels on a 10 point scale (10 highest). Eating and sleeping habits were recorded as well as time spent doing various activities (watching TV, reading, talking to others etc.) Behaviour was measured, for example, 'Movie Night' attendance.

Findings and Conclusions

At the end of the three-week experiment, the researchers found significant differences between the experimental group and the control group. Residents on the 4th floor reported significant increases in happiness and levels of activity (48%). These findings were confirmed by the nurses of each resident. Nurses found the 4th floor residents had improved greatly in alertness, active participation, and general sense of well-being compared with those residents on the 2nd floor.

The behavioural measures also confirmed the treatment had a positive beneficial effect on the 4th floor residents. Their movie attendance was significantly higher, and in the jelly-bean contest 10 fourth-floor residents took part while only 1 resident from the 2nd floor participants.

Overall, 93% of the residents on the 4th floor who were encouraged to make decisions for themselves, and give responsibility for something (even a plant) outside of themselves showed overall improvement. These residents were assessed by themselves and by their nurses as happier and more active. The improvements in mental alertness and increased behavioural involvement in many different kinds of activities seemed obvious to all.