

The CASCADE Project: Innovative dementia care in the community

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[Main text]

We have an ageing population with increasing numbers of older, frail people living with dementia requiring access to in-patient hospital services (Age UK 2019). But there are few appropriate facilities to cater for them or their families before or after a hospital stay, despite the rapidly rising costs of inadequate and inappropriate care provision (Wittenberg et al 2019).

Recently in the Netherlands, “guest houses” have been developed for people living with dementia. They offer a safe environment with care provided for those who are about to enter or have just left hospital after a medical intervention. Longer-term residential care services on-site are also available where people may otherwise remain in hospital in the absence of other appropriate care facilities.

Preliminary evidence suggested access to these Dutch guest houses not only speeds up recovery from an operation but may also enable people living with dementia to spend less time in hospital, be part of the local community, and receive support from specially trained staff. On that basis, the CASCADE project was developed to explore the suitability of the guest house concept in England.

Background

CASCADE stands for Community Areas of Sustainable Care and Dementia Excellence in Europe. It is a cross border collaboration which includes organisations in Belgium, France, the Netherlands and England. It was formed to improve the lives of people living with dementia and older people, predominantly residing in coastal areas connected by the English Channel and North Sea (“2 Seas”).

All project partners joined forces with key stakeholders (e.g. people living with dementia and family carers) to identify best practice in community integrated dementia care, the result of which informed the development of the CASCADE model of care. The project was funded by the EU Interreg 2 Seas programme and is due to be completed in 2021.

It aims to develop and embed a financially sustainable model of integrated dementia care in the community. Two newly built guest houses in Kent are offering people living with dementia a step up to or step down from hospital care before returning to their own homes. This will give them the opportunity to recover in suitable supported accommodation while fully integrated into the local communities of Dover and Rochester where the guest houses are located. Guest houses are care homes, but with a particular culture and outlook which we will outline.

Model of care

The model was developed to assist care staff in maintaining and encouraging residents’ abilities and improving their physical and mental health. The overall aim is to encourage independence in the community. It is based on the idea that holistic dementia care planned around the person’s abilities, strengths and interests is best practice for enabling meaningful independent living.

Developed and co-created with people living with dementia, the model has five main elements:

- person-centred care in the community
- strengths-based approach
- living life to the full
- positive public perception
- safe environment for independent living.

A learning package has been developed for care staff who will take part in training in the CASCADE ways of working. It covers three modules including: the principles of the model; workplace learning; and person-centred leadership in dementia care. The training will be delivered to staff before residents and their families begin arriving at the demonstrator sites. Further, the training materials will be made publicly available via a repository for anyone to use if they would like to learn more about the model.

How is it different?

CASCADE was founded by blending elements of best practice from care, sustainable technology, building design, training and business. It came together with the building of two brand new facilities in Kent - Harmonia Village and Harmony House. The vision of CASCADE is to give people living with dementia and their families a comfortable place they can call home, whilst engaging with the local community and activities they enjoy. These homes have been strategically located and specifically built in the heart of vibrant existing communities, offering huge potential for becoming part of those communities whose hallmarks are a commitment to equality and mutual support in which members give as well as receive (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018).

CASCADE is innovative in that it moves away from the traditionally Western biomedical and institutional understandings of dementia care towards a more holistic and person-centred approach. For example, the CASCADE model is grounded in providing holistic, personalised care to people living with dementia and their families to encourage independent living and participation in meaningful activities. It utilises people's current strengths and abilities to ensure they are able to live life to the fullest and feel part of local communities. The overall emphasis is on maintaining mental, emotional and physical wellbeing of people living with dementia for the duration of their stay at a CASCADE home.

Our hope is that CASCADE leads more widely to an anti-institutional approach based on a collective model.

Evaluating the model

We are carrying out an evaluation to demonstrate the acceptability and financial sustainability of the project, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Data collection is taking place over 12 months at three timepoints and aims to answer five research questions:

1. What is the impact on the wellbeing of people with dementia?
2. What is the impact on the family or significant others?
3. What is the impact on staff job satisfaction, recruitment and retention?
4. What is the impact of training on the development of individual staff competence in dementia care?
5. How cost effective is the model?

Data collection began in February 2020, with the arrival of the first guests at both Harmonia Village and Harmony House, and we expect to publish our findings in early 2021. In the meantime, updates on the project can be found on our Twitter account @CCCUCascade.

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