CultureCase

Treating dementia using arts interventions

This research was conducted by **Kate de Medeiros** and **Anne Basting** at **Miami University** and **University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, USA.**

Summary

Effective care for people with dementia is made more challenging by a lack of effective treatments for the condition. Arts interventions are becoming more popular due to their ability to effect social and behavioural change and may have potential in dementia management. These researchers sought to summarise the evidence for cultural arts interventions within dementia care and also to examine the specific research challenges unique to this area.

Arts interventions are effective but not easily quantified

From an extensive review of published literature, the authors compared the effect of medication, psychosocial and arts interventions on cognition, quality of life and problematic behaviours such as wandering and aggression. They concluded that arts interventions (specifically music) show comparable effectiveness to psychosocial treatments in terms of impact on quality of life and behaviour, with medication tending to be less effective.

Conventional research designs are poorly suited to arts interventions due to factors such as funding limitations, the personal nature of arts experiences, difficulty training practitioners to deliver interventions, and entrenched disciplinary boundaries. The authors suggest that a paradigm shift is required in order to effectively determine the impact of cultural arts interventions.

A new research perspective is needed

The authors have some key messages for researchers and their funders. Considering in more depth the individual components of arts interventions and how they work is likely to be more effective than confining research to traditionally separate disciplines and standard assessment methods. Exploring participants' individual interests and examining the impact of interventions in ways specific to each individual patient and their wider social network will allow the rich potential of arts interventions to be explored in greater depth.

This summary is by **Vicky MacBean, King's Knowledge Exchange Associate**

Keywords

literature review **music** **dementia** **behaviour**

Title	"Shall I Compare Thee to a Dose of Donepezil?": Cultural Arts Interventions in Dementia Care Research
Author(s)	de Medeiros, K. & Basting, A.
Publication date	2014
Source	Gerontologist, Vol 54, Iss 3, pp 344-353
Link	**https://academic.oup.com/gerontologist/article/54/3/344/719346/Shall-I-Compare-Thee-to-a-Dose-of-Donepezil**
Open Access Link	**https://academic.oup.com/gerontologist/article/54/3/344/719346/Shall-I-Compare-Thee-to-a-Dose-of-Donepezil**
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By **Culture.Case** | 20 July 2017 | **Health and wellbeing impacts of arts and culture** |

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