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Improving the communication and relation between people living with dementia and their relatives

Aim

The aim of this study was to evaluate a communication and relation course for people with dementia and their relatives. The course was developed by the Danish Alzheimer's Association, professionals and researchers in the dementia field.

Methods

Participant observation during the evaluation meeting
Storytelling with pictures with the people with dementia
Focus groups with the relatives
Thematic analysis inspired by Braun and Clarke

The course

The course included both people living with dementia and their relatives as both needed to learn about the illness and strategies for living a meaningful life. Thus, it gave them an opportunity to do something together. The course was held in five different municipalities in Denmark. In total 92 people attended the course.

Before attending the course, the participants met with the leader and a teacher of the course to identify the needs and wishes of the participants. The course was then designed to fulfill their wishes where possible.

At the beginning and end of the course all participants were together. Otherwise, the participants were divided, so people with dementia could participate in the social and learning activities they wanted, while the relatives received training in dementia, communication and relation building based upon the Marte Meo Method.



"If we only have had this course earlier..."

Results

The evaluation shows a need for courses including both people living with dementia and their relatives. It fulfills a need to be social and learn from other people experiencing the same life situation. For some it initiated social networking that continued after the course ended.

Getting away from home and being mentally and physically active were evaluated positively by people with dementia. The mutual support offered by other participants and the Alzheimer's Association was experienced as a positive outcome, enabling people to fully engage in the activities and reducing the impact of problems resulting from a loss of memory.

The relatives experienced the course as a gift where they learned about dementia and how to develop their communication and relation capabilities – leading to more positive relationships. They also realised that they were not the only ones struggling in life with dementia. However, it was difficult to balance between the teaching and the sharing experiences in the course.