EXPERIENCES AND BENEFITS OF ELDER CLOWNING FOR FAMILIES OF PERSONS WITH DEMENTIA IN LONG-TERM CARE

Sara-Jane Roberts[1], Serra Ivynian[1], Tim Luckett[1], Michelle DiGiacomo[1]
1. Improving Palliative, Aged and Chronic Care through Clinical Research and Translation (IMPACCT), University of Technology Sydney, Sydney, NSW, Australia

KEYWORDS

Family; psychosocial intervention; dementia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Elder clowning is a psychosocial intervention delivered to persons with dementia in long-term care (LTC) from which their families may also benefit. This study explored the ways families may benefit from elder clowning, from perspectives of families and LTC staff, through semi-structured interviews across four LTC homes in Australia. Interviews were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Family (n=11) and staff (n=20) perspectives resulted in two themes: transforming the emotional experience of visiting and strengthening family bonds through the shared experience. Elder clowning was found to support the psychosocial wellbeing and coping of families of persons with dementia in LTC.

INTRODUCTION

Dementia is a common cause of long-term care placement for older people. Following placement, persons with dementia and their families want to maintain their relationship, however, this can be challenging due to multiple losses due to the progression of dementia (e.g., speech, cognition). Maintaining close relationships supports the personhood of individuals with dementia, which is central to the delivery of person-centred care. Elder clowning is a psychosocial intervention delivered to persons living with dementia in long-term care that provides benefits such as supported personhood, engagement, stimulation, and socialisation. Previous research suggests that their families witness or are involved in elder clowning and derive their own benefits. Therefore, this study aimed to explore whether and in what ways families of persons living with dementia in long-term care experience and benefit from elder clowning interventions, from the perspectives of families and long-term care staff.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Elder clowning helped family members to have more positive, less stressful visits.
- Family members strengthened bonds with their relative through elder clowning.
- Elder clowning supported family members to upskill in person-centred communication.

METHODOLOGY

Families of persons living with dementia and staff members across four long-term care homes in Eastern Australia were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews, in-person or online. Interview topics included perceptions of the impact of elder clowning for families, including potential benefits. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed according to Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis.

RESULTS

Family member (n=11) and staff (n=20) perspectives on benefits of elder clowning resulted in two themes: 1) transforming the emotional experience of visiting (Figure 1) and 2) strengthening family bonds through the shared experience (Figure 2). During visits to LTC, families witnessed the outcomes of supported personhood through the delivery of person-centred care, which supported more positive, meaningful visiting experiences and reduced stress throughout visits (before, during, and after visits) and when absent from the LTC home. Families were supported to connect with and strengthen their bonds with their relative by engaging in shared activities. By witnessing interactions with the elder clown, family members learned that their relative still possessed communicative capacity and new dementia-specific communication skills, which family members implemented independently from elder clowning visits.

CONCLUSION

Elder clowning interventions support the psychosocial wellbeing and coping of families of persons with dementia in long-term care, providing benefits beyond entertainment and humour.

Figures

Figure 1 is a visual overview of ‘transforming the emotional experience of visiting’ theme and sub-themes

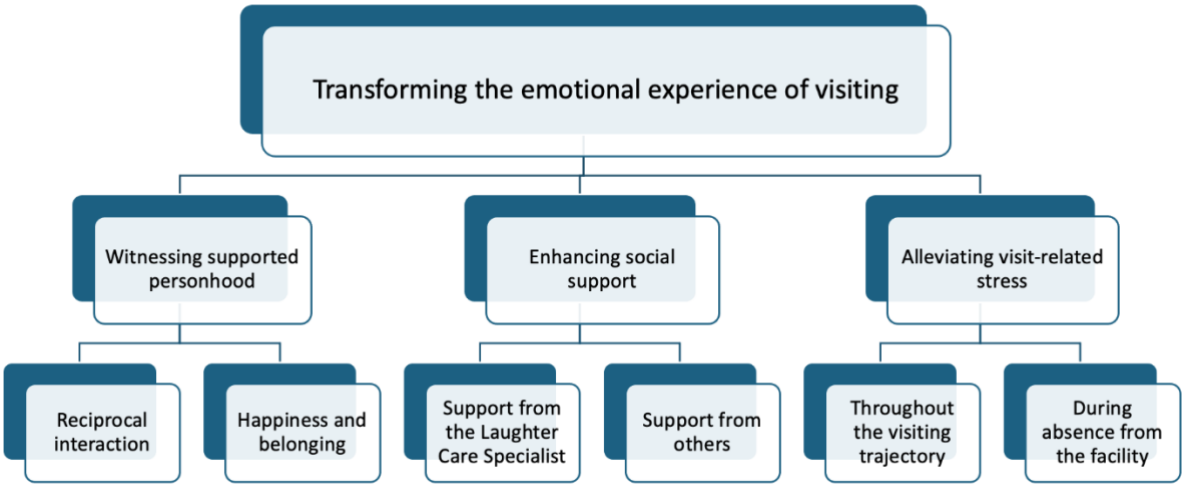

Figure 1. Theme 1 and sub-themes

Figure 2 is a visual overview of ‘strengthening family bonds through the shared experience’ theme and sub-themes

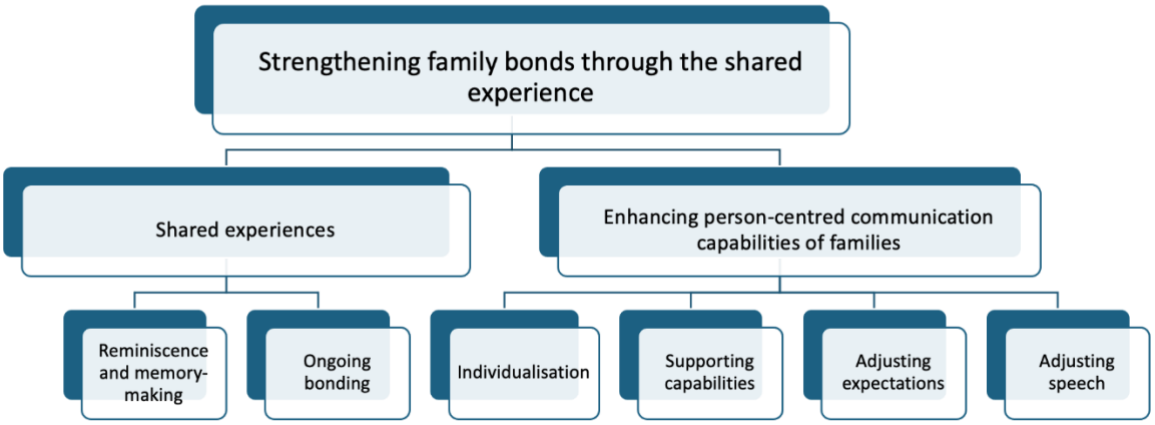

Figure 2. Theme 2 and sub-themes