



International perspectives on arts and dementia research

The Gerontologist. 2016 November 1;56

In November 2016 over 3,600 international experts gathered in New Orleans to discuss the wider role of aging science during the Gerontological Society of America's Annual Scientific Meeting. The allocation of a symposium for Arts and Dementia research highlighted the rising importance of arts programmes as non-pharmacological therapies in dementia care. Despite their manifest potential, art programmes have raised certain questions: can art interventions tangibly improve quality of life and well-being? Do they have an impact on caregivers or result in broader community benefits? What makes programmes for people with dementia successful and audience-appropriate? Equally, paralleled with the implementation of art programmes appears the inherent need to quantify and evaluate their outcomes.

To shed light on these questions, the symposium, chaired by G. Windle from Bangor University, drew together perceptions from the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands. The British multidisciplinary collaboration *Dementia and Imagination* presented a mixed-method protocol to conduct research which integrates the science and art realms. The protocol emphasises the need for integrated data collection and analysis –both quantitative and qualitative– when evaluating to what extent an art programme is beneficial for the quality of life of those living with dementia. Similarly, it was stressed the importance of including participants' views when trying to gain insight into how effective art interventions are in improving their lives. Ideally, these evaluations should also be extended to caregivers and, when pertinent, to artists and other professionals involved. The Dutch intervention, which was evaluated by scientific research, offered 'Unforgettable' art tours for people with dementia and their caregivers following the programme Meet me at MOMA (Museum of Modern Art in New York). Due to its success the programme was tailored to different participants' needs and disseminated to 10 museums across the country. Museums acted as agents of social change promoting social inclusion, generating positive cognitive and emotional effects for those living with dementia and their caregivers.

All in all, the symposium strengthened the position that institutions, museums and research centres alike, should be encouraged to exploit the advantageous opportunities that art programmes offer both to people living with dementia and their caregivers. Art and dementia research is a promising avenue that ought to be included in national dementia strategies across the world.