

Vision and hearing impairment in older age

What services can nursing provide to afford the safety of individuals with vision or hearing impairment?

Approximately 1 million people in Switzerland have poor hearing. Persons older than 70 years of age often have reduced visual acuity together with a hearing impairment. Having a double impairment impacts the safety of affected individuals. They can have difficulty finding their way even within the comfort of their own home. Accidents increase. Hearing impairments in particular may lead to psychological and familial problems. Even though one rarely speaks of it, many affected individuals feel stigmatized, which may lead to depression and cause the whole family to suffer. In addition, hearing impairments may contribute to a decline in cognitive ability as well as the development of dementia.

However not much is known about the everyday life and perceptions of individuals over 70 with hearing or visual impairments. This knowledge gap has impacts on the nursing profession, since nurses are not able to appropriately address the needs of these individuals. Moreover, there is an absence of sound research-based training related to the nursing care of these patients. And even when the patient education provided by nurses is directly targeted to individuals with hearing and vision impairments, we are unable to assess its effectiveness due to the lack of scientific knowledge on this topic.

That is the why this study aims to describe the structuring or shaping of daily life from the perspective of individuals with hearing and vision impairments. Based on the results, we plan to develop strategies to prevent accidents and injury, as well as a service that offers nursing advice to patients.

Description/Background

Numerous studies have shown that concurrent hearing and visual impairment affects safety in the home environment. Hearing impairments in particular lead to actual or perceived stigmatization. This can lead to depression, which can affect the well-being of the whole family. In addition, hearing impairments may contribute to a decline in cognitive ability as well as the development of dementia.

To date, little is known about the daily life of individuals over 70 years of age who suffer from concurrent hearing and visual impairment. In particular it is unclear how affected individuals shape their daily life and to what extent they feel restricted from participating in everyday activities. In addition, there is a lack of nursing-based patient education which would be well suited to systematically prevent accidents in the home environment.

Goal

The study will describe the shaping of everyday life from the perspective of individuals with hearing and visual impairments. Based on the results, we will develop suitable strategies for injury prevention as well as nurse-led patient education.



Approach

Both qualitative and quantitative data will be collected. For this purpose, 60 guided interviews will be conducted with individuals over 70 years of age who have hearing and vision impairments. The data collection will also include documentation of the specific hearing and vision impairment, along with information on the use of assistive devices and the patient education required for the use of these aids.

In addition, the study participants will complete a survey on the structure of their daily life. The interviews and written surveys will be conducted in the homes of the participants. The project, including both data collection and analysis, will span 18 months.

Expected Gain in Knowledge

The investigation will generate knowledge on the relationship between independent living and dependency among individuals over 70 years of age with hearing and vision impairments. In addition, the research will describe the personal significance of the risk of accidents from the perspective of the affected individuals. These insights will help nurses to appreciate the world as experienced by individuals with hearing and vision impairment. With this information nurses will be able to provide targeted support to these individuals and encourage self-care. Needs-based nursing care may delay or entirely prevent a move to assisted living. In addition, nurses can support and integrate primary caretakers, so that the impacts of the hearing and vision impairments can be factored into the daily life, and family cohesion can be fostered. Further, measures that are based on evidence-based knowledge can be effectively evaluated and thereby support a lasting nursing practice.