
Library Service at the North Carolina Special Care Center

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The North Carolina Special Care Center is located in Wilson, North Carolina. Its population is geriatric mental patients who suffer a variety of handicapping conditions. The majority of the patients are nonambulatory and functioning on a very low mental state. The staff at the North Carolina Special Care Center focuses on assisting each resident to reach his maximum potential by utilizing an interdisciplinary approach to the rehabilitative process. We feel that a functioning library could contribute to this process. Developing a library program for institutionalized geriatric residents is challenging, to say the least.

At present, there is no real library program. We have a library in the basement but it is very difficult to access and the library materials are far too advanced to be useful. The balance of this article will describe our concept of an ideal library for our situation.

Any future library program established at the Special Care Center must serve as adjunctive therapy in coordination with existing programs. The program must be designed to encompass the total informational needs of the library patrons. It should supplement and reinforce not only the recreational or leisure time programs but also the developmental programs for ward patients suffering from a wide variety of disabling conditions. Many residents have little energy, limited mobility and reduced senses: sight, hearing, touch and smell. Because of these limitations it is necessary to utilize special environmental safety precautions.

To compensate for the limited movement and strength of our patients library materials must be placed within comfortable reach. Furniture, bathrooms, and other fixed library accessories must be adapted to accommodate wheelchairs. To reach the maximum number of residents who cannot leave their wards, a mobile library utilizing

volunteers from the community should be implemented.

In order for the residents to develop independent library skills, a variety of multimedia materials must be utilized. These include talking books; lightweight, colorful, large print books; sand boxes; mirrors; etc. The library program should incorporate a variety of stimulating experiences: films, field trips, flash cards, scientific experiments, etc. Materials should be age appropriate and on the level that would provide the maximum pleasure and benefit to our residents.

It has been very difficult to find library materials designed specifically for geriatric residents with a psychiatric background. If any of our readers know of successful projects or appropriate materials please contact us at the Special Care Center.

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Currently, a group of twenty residents meets on a weekly basis for a storyhour conducted by volunteers. The volunteers use a variety of tools to assist each resident in developing fine motor, gross motor, cognitive and social interaction skills. The residents are encouraged to be creative and make up their own stories with such things as pictures, plants and animals. Field trips and audiovisual equipment help to reinforce the residents' learning. Talking books, magazines, puzzles, texture boards, etc., are placed on the wards by the volunteers. In addition, volunteers from a local church provide residents with weekly Bible classes. Volunteers play a vital role in providing special services for our residents.

Johnnie M. McManus is Activities Director at the North Carolina Special Care Center in Wilson.