



Showing the Way: developing an evaluation framework for signage for people living with dementia

Background

Environments that are well designed can support people with dementia to find their way around. Signage is an important part of this, but there has been little research on signage in dementia environments. Current guidelines on the principles of dementia design do not cover signage in much detail.

Showing the Way sought to fill this gap in research and practical knowledge.

What we did

Showing the Way was a joint research project, carried out in Edinburgh, UK, and Australasia. The project started with workshops, held in UK and Australia, involving academics, practitioners people with dementia and carers. We discussed factors relating to signage, the wider environment, inclusive design, wayfinding and how to evaluate signage.

Based on the workshop outputs, three rounds of surveys were sent out to around 30 people. The process, known as a Delphi study, was designed so that at the end there were statements that represented the groups' views (consensus). From there, a framework for evaluating signage in dementia environments was developed. People with dementia found the workshops more interactive and so easier to take part in than the Delphi study.



What we found out: factors to be considered when designing signs for a dementia environment

- ✓ Have relevant guidelines been consulted?
- ✓ Have both words and images been used on the signs?
- ✓ Will the signs be understood by everyone using the setting?
- ✓ Is the sign consistent with all other signs and cues in the setting?
- ✓ Is the signage familiar to people in the setting?
- ✓ Is the font (size, style, direction, contrast) right?
- ✓ Is the sign positioned so that people can use it?
- ✓ Does the sign contain only the information that is needed?

What we found out: factors to be considered in the wider environment to support wayfinding

- ✓ Are there multiple cues that will support people to find their way?
- ✓ Has all extra clutter (visual and auditory) been minimised?
- ✓ Is there adequate lighting on and around the signage and in the environment?
- ✓ Have the needs of the specific people who will be using the signage been considered?
- ✓ In residential care and domestic contexts, does the signage maintain a “homely” atmosphere?



What we found out: what happens when signage and environments are enabling

Effective signage and environments will enable:

- ✓ Wayfinding and navigation: ability to get to and back from a desired location
- ✓ Sense-making: the ability to understand places and functions of places
- ✓ A sense of well-being, through feeling in control and moving about in space
- ✓ A reduction of anxiety associated with feeling “lost” and unsure of one’s surroundings.

What we found out: how to evaluate signage and environments

- ✓ Using the above points, regular audits of signage and its effectiveness should be undertaken in dementia environments
- ✓ In carrying out audits and evaluations, an assessment of how people interact with a sign will help to understand its effectiveness
- ✓ Walking through real life situations with people with dementia allows them to be involved in evaluation
- ✓ Techniques that allow us to measure emotional responses are essential
- ✓ Using observational techniques allows a wide range of people with dementia to become involved in evaluation of signs

continued...





- ✓ The context of a sign should be considered when measuring its effectiveness
- ✓ Interactive approaches will allow a person living with dementia to be involved in evaluating signs

What needs to happen now.....

More research is needed to develop these findings in many different dementia environments.

Future research needs to be interactive and use methods that mean that researchers and people with dementia can work together to enable all people with dementia to find their way around the environments in which they live and move.

Showing the Way was a joint research project between the Dementia Centre at HammondCare, Australia, and Edinburgh Centre for Research in the Experience of Dementia, University of Edinburgh, UK. It was funded by Dementia Collaborative Research Centre, Australia.

**For a copy of the full report
contact ecred@ed.ac.uk**

ecred
Putting the person first

