

The story behind the door

An explorative study on the added value of
true doors for residents of care homes

Originally published September 2015. English translation January 2019.



Colophon

Target group

For everyone who works in residential care with elderly people with dementia or people with psychiatric problems and who is interested in creating a familiar and homely environment for residents.

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Funding

True Doors

With thanks to

All family members, professional caregivers and volunteers from the D'n Aok site of the Charim care group who participated in the interviews and manager Mariëtte Foppen, team leader Herma van Harten and the members of the jury of the MSD Care Awards 2014.

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1. Introduction

1.1 What are true doors?

True doors are stick-on doors with an image of a front door of a former house of a person with dementia who now lives in a care home. A front door often symbolises a certain period of someone's life or a place where someone has enjoyed living. When this person moves to the care home, the door from the past can, as it were, be moved with someone to the new living environment. True Doors developed the true door in 2014 to contribute to creating a familiar feeling of home for a person with dementia who is admitted to a care home.

Before the true door is installed, a member of the True Doors team discusses with the person with dementia (resident) and/or a family member the houses that the person with dementia has positive memories about. This can be the house where the person with dementia grew up or the house where they lived with their spouse. Then, one door is selected and a picture is taken of this door. After that, the picture is used to make a print on flame-retardant plastic, which is glued to the resident's front door in the care home.

Sometimes it is not possible or desirable to use a picture of a former house, for example when the resident has no pleasurable memories of their former house or because the house does not exist anymore. In that case, the residents can choose a door from a selection of true doors made by the care home.

1.2 Purpose of the study

To explore whether added value of the true doors is experienced in practice, as envisioned by True Doors during the development, Trimbos-institute started an explorative study early in 2015 in the D'n Aok care home, which is part of the Charim care group in Veenendaal.

2. Method

2.1 Setting

D'n Aok is a facility with a BOPZ authorisation (special admissions to psychiatric hospitals), which means that residents live behind closed doors and can not leave the facility. D'n Aok has two residential groups: a group with nine elderly people with dementia and a group with nine elderly people with psychiatric problems. In March 2015, 15 out of 18 residents chose their own true door and the doors were installed. There were two double rooms, each with one true door for both occupants of the room. Family members of three residents did not give their permission to participate in the project. These family members thought their family member would not benefit from a true door, because they were in an advanced stage of dementia.

2.2 Design of the study

Individual face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted with family members and professional caregivers of the residents as well as volunteers who work at D'n Aok. Interviews were semi-structured with a duration of no more than thirty minutes.

2.3 Participants

Six family members of residents, fourteen health care professionals and volunteers of D'n Aok were interviewed. The family members were children, brothers, nieces and in-laws of the residents. The health care professionals and volunteers* were a team leader, two PRCs (primary responsible caregivers), seven IHCs (individual health care caregivers), three hostesses and one volunteer. The participants were invited by mail to participate in the interviews. Before the study, all participants received a letter with information about the project.

2.4 Data collection procedure

The interviews were held three weeks after the true doors were installed on three different days in the D'n Aok care facility. Participants could also participate in a telephone interview at a time of their choosing. With consent of the interviewee the face-to-face interviews were recorded. The telephone interviews were not recorded. The interviews were conducted by two researchers.

2.5 Analysis of individual interviews

During the interview, the researchers asked questions about various predetermined topics: feeling at home, sense of direction, mood, memories, group dynamics and atmosphere in the living environment of the resident in the care home. Other topics that emerged during the interview could also be discussed. After the interviews, the researchers summarized the interviews using the recordings and their written notes. After that, the transcriptions of the interviews were coded. The themes that emerged from this procedure are described in the results section.

** To improve readability of this report, health care professionals and volunteers are called "professional caregivers".*

3 Results

3.1 Impact on residents and family members

3.1.1 Feeling at home

Professional caregivers indicate that they think that a number of residents felt more at home in the residential groups since their true door was installed. Their own explanation is that this is because a front door makes residents feel like they are in their own house instead of in a room in a care home. The professional caregivers noticed that, since the true doors were installed, several residents described their room as *“my little house”*.

Some respondents think that recognising a door from the past helps residents feel more at home. A professional caregiver explained:

“One resident was often angry, aggressive and restless. He always wanted to go home and stood in front of the outside door waiting to leave. Now that he has a true door with a picture of his old door, he calmly goes to his room, because he now recognises it as ‘home’.”

The family members do not indicate they notice that their loved one has started feeling more at home after the true door was installed.

3.1.2 Sense of direction

Professional caregivers report that before the true doors were introduced, all doors looked the same and it was hard for residents to recognize their own room. There were pictures of the resident or another picture hanging next to the doors. The professional caregivers think that this did trigger a familiar feeling for the residents, but a number of residents still found it difficult to find their own room.

Professional caregivers and family members are noticing that it has become easier for some residents to find their way in the hallways since the true doors were installed. Some residents often had to ask the professional caregivers how to find their rooms. Professional caregivers are noticing that this has improved a great deal since the true doors were installed. These residents are now better able to distinguish their own and someone else's room and public spaces such as toilets. Some residents are now walking straight to their room while saying out loud: *“Yes, this is my room”*.

The influence of the true doors on the sense of direction of the residents has especially been noticed in residents with dementia. Residents with psychiatric problems were generally able to find their way along the hallways before the true doors were installed.

3.1.3 Mood

Professional caregivers and family members are noticing that the true doors have a positive influence on the mood of the residents. A family member reports:

"I do think my sister has started to feel better after the true door was installed. I notice a general sense of well-being in her and I feel like the personal touch of the door has certainly influenced that. "

One professional caregiver says that some residents have said that they are happy with their door and that it strikes her that they smile more often when they return to their rooms. Professional caregivers and family members of residents with psychiatric problems indicate that it is very important for them to have chosen their own door. They find making decisions by themselves is very important. Because they chose the door themselves and were happy with their choice, they were proud of their door and openly enjoyed their door.

Family members report that the true doors also have a positive influence on them. They think the doors are nice and that they create a cheerful, homely atmosphere.

3.1.4 Memories

Professional caregivers say that a few residents were able to remember that they have lived behind this door when seeing their true door. The door also evokes memories of the past. Some professional caregivers say that they have deliberately used the true doors to reminisce with residents. During one of those conversations, a resident indicated that her door used to have a different colour and has been painted over since then. Seeing the former front door evoked an emotional response in a few elderly people and their families. A professional caregiver states:

"One lady became quite emotional when she saw her true door because she recognised her old house (...). The door reminded her of the past."

Some family members indicate that they themselves have started to talk more about the past, because they too have memories of the former house. When they talk about this with their loved one, they notice it helps to reminisce together.

3.1.5 Privacy

Professional caregivers report that there are residents who asked the staff if they could get a lock on their door after the true door was installed. However, the homes in this care home are fitted with a lock. But according to the professional caregivers, these residents now also want to actually lock the door themselves. They think that this is because, since the residents got a true door, residents have come to see their room more as their own house rather than a room in a care home. One of the residents now actually closes her door more often when she leaves her room, while she did not do this before.

Professional caregivers indicate that one resident wants to go to her room when she is sad

and needs privacy. She is now better able to retire when she needs it because she can find her room more easily on her own, thanks to the true door.

3.1.6 Atmosphere

The professional caregivers think that the atmosphere in the hallways has become more enjoyable and homely since the true doors were installed. They note that it is like one walks through a street and that the hallways no longer look 'like a hospital'. They think the residents' rooms have now become much more personal and that this is experienced as very positive by the residents, as well as by professional caregivers and family members. A professional caregivers notes about this:

"The atmosphere in the department is now more enjoyable, cosier and much more 'personal'. It looks much more homely, no longer so cold and uninviting. I have only heard enthusiastic stories from the professional caregivers and the family members so far."

The professional caregivers have noticed that mainly residents of the psychiatric residential group express themselves about the atmosphere in the care home since the true doors were installed. Residents indicate that the hallways are quite nice and cozy.

3.1.7 Social interaction

The professional caregivers have noticed that two residents regularly walk through the hallway together to look at the doors and talk about them since the true doors were installed. So, the doors are giving these ladies a reason to talk and they encourage them to undertake a joint activity, in this case, going for a walk together.

Family members indicate that they now occasionally go for a walk along the hallways with their loved one to look at the true doors. For example, the resident then likes to compare and evaluate the doors. Family members themselves are also happy to do this together.

3.2 Impact on professional caregivers

Although the true doors were initially developed to make residents of a care home feel more at home, a large part of the interviewed professional caregivers indicated that they also experienced a positive influence from the doors themselves.

Professional caregivers note that the true doors not only help the residents, but also help themselves to find their way through the hallways. Because the doors are now much more pronounced than before, it is easier for them to link a certain occupant to a specific door. This helps, among other things, when helping the residents to bed.

The professional caregivers also noticed that they now more often knock on the door of a resident before they enter the room. This did not happen as much before the true doors were installed. They think that this is because the true doors make them feel more as if they are entering someone's personal residence. This leads them to show more respect for the residents' privacy.

Finally, some professional caregivers feel that the true doors are making their work more enjoyable. The homely atmosphere and the personal character of the doors certainly play a role there. A professional caregiver indicated she was proud of her workplace:

“The rooms are now much more personal, which means the residents are more respected in their identity. And I think it looks very cozy. I am really proud of my workplace and I also like to show the true doors to other visitors.”



4. Conclusion

This explorative study shows that true doors within a residential group for elderly people with dementia and psychiatric problems can have a positive impact on the residents. Because of the true doors one can feel more at home in the residential group, feel more comfortable and experience the room more as one's "own little house". True doors can also lead to a stronger sense of privacy; something that, since the true doors were installed, a number of residents but also professional caregivers are more aware of. In addition, true doors seem to have an influence on sense of direction, because it helps residents to find their own room on their own more easily.

The doors also encourage conversations with the residents about their past or joint activities, such as walks along the hallways of the care home. This is an important finding, since the Living Arrangements for People with Dementia study* indicates that sharing memories with residents (reminiscence) happens relatively rarely, even though this has been proved to be an activity with a positive effect on the residents' well-being.

The question remains how it could be ensured that residents benefit as much as possible from the true doors. A manual for professional caregivers and family members with guides on how to use the true doors to have conversations about the past with residents, could, for example, increase the likelihood of reminiscing more often with residents.

* B.M. Willemse, C. Wessel & A.M. Pot (2015). *Living Arrangements for People with Dementia study (Monitor Woonvormen Dementie.)*. Trends and success factors in nursing home care for people with dementia. 2008-2014. Utrecht: Trimbos-instituut.

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