Roller Shades with Nature Motive Supports Wellbeing Among Patients in a Heart Intensive Unit—Proof of Concept

Helle Noorlind Brage
Unit for Health Analysis, Centre for Healthcare Development, County Council of Östergötland, Linköping SE-581 91, Sweden

Received: October 27, 2014 / Accepted: December 01, 2014 / Published: December 30, 2014.

Abstract: Being a patient in a strange and unknown environment is sometimes very stressful. Research has shown that a health promoting environment can reduce anxiety and enhance wellbeing and views of nature can support this. This low-cost intervention was performed at a heart surgery intensive care unit. The aim was to use a simple method to improve the health care environment and to monitor the experiences of patients and staff. Two patients share the same room at the ICU. The beds can be separated by roller shades that are plain grey and neutral. These were changed to new ones with nature motives. Questionnaires with fixed and open questions were used for evaluation among patients and staff. Patients treated in an ICU seem to be aware of the surrounding environment even if they are severely ill. Both patients and staff stated that the roller shades with motive affected wellbeing in a positive way. An esthetical pleasing environment can contribute to wellbeing even if the effort is small and insignificant. Roller shades with nature motive might be an easy way to improve and strengthen a health promoting environment.

Key words: Intervention, health care environment, case study, ICU heart clinic, roller with nature motives.

1. Introduction

Being a patient in a strange and unknown environment is sometimes very frightening and stressful. Research has shown that spending time in intensive care (ICU) might affect your health negatively with symptoms of post-traumatic stress [1]. Research has also shown that a health promoting environment in health care can reduce stress and anxiety and also strengthen the psycho-neuro-immunological system [2-4]. Motives like water, flowers and trees have been shown attractive to patients with different cultural and ethnical back grounds [5, 6]. Only a few minutes of exposure to pictures of nature can promote health and lower levels of stress. Lowered blood pressure, less pain medication, enhanced wellbeing and faster recovery has been shown [7].

In 2013, a project involving roller shades with nature motives was performed at a heart surgery intensive unit at the University hospital in Linköping Sweden. The aim was to use a simple method to improve the health care environment and to monitor the experiences of patients and staff, according to previous research findings.

2. Case study setting

This low-cost intervention was performed on patients treated in an ICU who had undergone heart-lung operations or were in need of intensive care after a myocardial infarction. In co-operation with the management, the intervention was put in place as a health promoting initiative to improve the environment. The patients, who are severely ill, might remain in the ICU for up to several weeks. In one room for two patients, one bed is situated by a window with a partial view of a brick wall. The other bed is placed beside the
first with very little outdoor view. To give the patients a little privacy the beds can be separated by a roller shade, one at the foot side and one between the beds. These rollers are plain grey and neutral. New rollers with nature motives were used at the intervention.

The intervention was performed during late autumn/winter and the motives on the rollers reflected these seasons. The roller between the patients had the same motive on both sides while the roller at the foot-side had motive towards the patient only.

3. Methods

The goal was to collect opinions about the environment and the roller shades from both patients and personnel before and after introducing the modified roller shades. Questionnaires with fixed and open questions were used for evaluation (Appendix A.). Patients were asked about the environment in general and about their notion and opinions of the rollers with nature motives. Since the patients can be severely ill, the number of questions was held low and their answers were recorded by regular staff in the clinic. The staff answered the same questions as well as questions of how the rollers, in their opinion, contributed to the environment and their effect on the quality of care and wellbeing among themselves and the patients.

The base line period, rollers without motives, lasted one month. The intervention period had to be shortened to two weeks due to a low number of patients at the time.

4. Results and Analyses

Two patients and 13 staff answered the questionnaire at base line. They rated the environment relatively poor and made negative comments about the possibilities of privacy, “Too much disturbing noise” and “No room for privacy” were comments from patients.

Five patients were treated during the intervention period and all had, although they were severely ill, noticed the rollers. All of them expressed their likings and rated their wellbeing high with the rollers. “Nice to look at”, “Good effect on my health” and “They make me feel euphoric” were comments from patients. On a scale from 0 (lowest value) to 10 (highest value) the patients rated their wellbeing as 9, with the rollers with motive.

The staff rated the environment important for everyone visiting the room. They stated that the rollers shades with motive affected wellbeing in a positive way. The positive effect of quality of care and need for medication among the patients, was rated slightly lower.

All persons who spent time in the room during the intervention assessed the environment as better than those who attended the room at base line. If this effect is caused by the rollers with motives cannot be concluded from this data collection. However, none of the respondents commented the rollers with nature motives in any negative way.

Not being a research study, the intervention can only give indications of how the respondents interpret the environment. Even if considered small, non-intrusive and inexpensive, it seems that the roller with nature motives enhances the environment for those spending time in the ICU.

5. Discussion

Positive distraction and attraction in health care environments affects both patients and staff. Research has shown that a beautiful attractive waiting room enhanced patient satisfaction and ratings of the quality of care [7]. When treated in beautiful rooms patients rated the skills of the doctor and other staff higher than when treated in a less attractive room. Hospital services, like quality of cleaning and food, were also rated more positively when treated in the attractive room [8].

Since the roller with motives had the same quality as the ones already in use, no new materials or products were introduced to the ICU. No new functions or products that might disturb processes or had
unhygienic effects were therefore introduced.

Using rollers, curtains or other barriers between patients is a very common way for separation and there are thousands of them in a big hospital. As long as they are plain grey they do not contribute to a health promoting environment. Choosing products with nature motives instead might be a cheap and easy way to improve the environment. In this case the price for a roller with motive was about 60 USD, (including photo and printing) in comparison with 45 USD for rollers without motive.

Due to practical matters the rollers could only be printed to about half of the total height. It would probably have been better to print the whole roller but this implies that the motive must be visible when the roller is only partly raised. Printing the whole roller might also need a photo with a higher solution and therefore might become more expensive. The roller at the foot-side had motive towards the patient only. Comments from the staff working in the room having to pass the grey side, pointed out that they would have liked motives on both sides. An interesting comment, that we take as evidence of their notion that a plain grey roller is boring for staff as well.

6. Conclusions

The esthetic environment in health care is of great importance to both patients and staff. Patients treated in an ICU seem to be aware of the surrounding environment even if they are severely ill. An esthetical pleasing environment can contribute to wellbeing even if the effort is small and insignificant, with no introduced detrimental effects on quality of care.

Roller shades with nature motive might be an easy way to improve and strengthen a health promoting environment.

Using roller shades with motives of nature did not seem to have any negative influences at all but the method should be further evaluated before introduced in routine practice.

Acknowledgments

The author gratefully acknowledges RN Ph.D. Carina Hjelm and the Heart surgery intensive unit at the University hospital in Linköping, Sweden. The author also thanks PhD Joakim Ekberg, Unit for Health Analysis, County Council of Östergötland for critical reviewing of the manuscript. The intervention was funded by the County Council of Östergötland, Sweden.

References

Appendix A

Examples of questions before and after the intervention:

To patients:
If you look around, how would you interpret the surrounding environment?
(0 = very bad, 10 = very good).

Can you give an example of something that is positive or negative in the surrounding environment?
Can you think of something that would improve the surrounding environment?

To staff also:
How would you rate the effect of the environment in the ward concerning (0= not at all, 10= very much):
- your working environment
- the patient in general
- the quality of care

Patients at intervention also:
Have you noticed the rollers with motives? Yes/No
If so, how would you rate their impact on your wellbeing? (0= not at all, 10= very much)

Staff at intervention also:
How would you rate the rollers with motives affect (0= not at all, 10= very much);
- the environment in general
- the quality of care
- wellbeing of the patients
- your own wellbeing