

## **Residential's Mental Health Team in Pontevedra (Galicia, Spain)**

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### Key highlights:

- Older adults living in residential care facilities are a vulnerable group requiring specific care.
- There is evidence on the benefit of cognitive stimulation both in groups and individually for older adults living with dementia.
- Social service and health care teams facilitate healthcare system access for older adults with dementia.
- In Pontevedra (Galicia, Spain), social service and healthcare teams have developed the use of cognitive stimulation as a group intervention for older adults residing in nursing facilities.

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The care of institutionalised older adults has become increasingly relevant over time, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, and following publications such as Wang (1) in the Lancet or ADI (2). Prior to the pandemic, it was known that institutionalised individuals are a vulnerable population with a higher rate of physical comorbidity, mental health problems (e.g., higher rate of depressive or anxiety disorders), and cognitive impairment, which leads to loss of functionality and greater dependence on others. Furthermore, the difficulties at a social level cannot be ignored which worsened during the pandemic, with included greater difficulty accessing healthcare, greater isolation and the risk of contracting COVID-19 itself.

Different proposals have been developed to improve access to healthcare for this at-risk population. Multiple studies have identified risk factors in institutionalised populations and seek to reduce risk through different pharmacological and non-pharmacological interventions (3). Reviews such as Gomez-Soria (4) or, more recently, the latest Cochrane review, indicate that there is evidence supporting both individual and group cognitive stimulation for improving cognitive function, socialization and quality of life for older adults with dementia (5).

In Galicia (Spain), social and healthcare programs have been developed, which recruit health professionals to work with those living with dementia promoting autonomy and quality of life.

In the Pontevedra O Salnés region, through the “Programa Galego de Saúde Mental Post-covid 2020-2024”, there has been a socio-health care program for the last 2 years, which seeks to provide care to institutionalised patients, and complements the Psychogeriatrics Unit of the Psychiatry service.

It is a multidisciplinary team made up of a psychiatrist (Dr. Raquel Grande González) and a mental health nurse (Mrs. Verónica Ferro Bua).

Their approach is individualized to the patient and includes a detailed history and biography, review of symptoms, medication review, and functional assessment of independence. An individualized care plan is then established which can be modified overtime depending on need.

This type of intervention is the basis for standardised interventions such as WHELD, which present scientific evidence that improves quality of life, psychomotor agitation, neuropsychiatric symptoms and the use of psychotropic drugs in people with cognitive impairment (6).

Among the different activities carried out, the team would like to highlight the implementation of a group program for older adults with mild cognitive impairment admitted to a nursing home. Group therapy is one of the interventions that can be carried out with older people which promotes sociability, and has been used for cognitive rehabilitation and the treatment of affective and anxious symptoms. Recent reviews, such as that of Rostamzadeh, A (7) emphasize the importance of psychotherapeutic and psychoeducational interventions in people with dementia.

Regarding the proposal of the Social and Health Team, it is a group therapy for people aged 60-75 years that aims to work on cognitive rehabilitation and executive functions (cognitive stimulation), while promoting individual autonomy and self-care.

The target population are those without cognitive impairment or with a diagnosis of Mild Cognitive Impairment. Many of residents of the facility where the program is carried out have a comorbid psychiatric pathology

(severe mental disorder or personality disorders). Exclusion from the group is the presence of a diagnosis of dementia or a disorder or alterations of conduct or disruptive behaviour. The number of sessions is 8-10, with a duration of one hour and a fortnightly frequency. The different activities include exercises or cognitive stimulation tasks, the use of narrative techniques (poetry reading) and the use of music. Although the program is in its early stages, the team is hopeful to achieve positive results.



Pontevedra's Social and Health care team: Dr. Raquel Grande (Psychiatrist) and Mrs. Verónica Ferro (Mental Health Nurse)

**For further reading:**

(1) Wang, H.; Li, T.; Barbarino, P.; Gauthier, S.; Brodaty, H.; Molinuevo, J.L.; Xie, H.; Sun, Y.; Yu, E.; Tang, Y.; et al. Dementia care during COVID-19. *Lancet* 2020, 11, 1190–1191.

(2) Alzheimer's Disease International. ADI offers advice and support during COVID-19. March 17, 2020. <https://www.alz.co.uk/news/adi-offers-advice-and-support-during-covid-19> (accessed March 27, 2020).

(3) Camacho-Conde, J. A., & Galán-López, J. M. (2020). Depression and cognitive impairment in institutionalized older adults. *Dementia and Geriatric Cognitive Disorders*, 49(1), 107-120.

(4) Gómez-Soria, I., Iguacel, I., Aguilar-Latorre, A., Peralta-Marrupe, P., Latorre, E., Zaldívar, J. N. C., & Calatayud, E. (2022). Cognitive stimulation and cognitive results in older adults: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics*, 104807.

(5) Woods, B., Rai, H. K., Elliott, E., Aguirre, E., Orrell, M., & Spector, A. (2023). Cognitive stimulation to improve cognitive functioning in people with dementia. *Cochrane database of systematic reviews*, (1).

(6) Ballard C, Corbett A, Orrell M, Williams G, Moniz-Cook E, et al. (2018) Impact of person-centred care training and person-centred activities on quality of life, agitation, and antipsychotic use in people with dementia living in nursing homes: A cluster-randomised controlled trial. *PLOS Medicine* 15(2): e1002500. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1002500>

(7) Rostanzadeh, Kahlert, A., Kalthegener, F., & Jessen, F. (2022). Psychotherapeutic interventions in individuals at risk for Alzheimer's dementia: a systematic review. *Alzheimer's Research & Therapy*., 14(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13195-021-00956-8>.