

Airedale General Hospital's Dementia Garden

Case Study by The Centre for Sustainable Healthcare

Airedale Hospital in Keighley, West Yorkshire opened in 1970 and treats 25,000 inpatients, 26,000 non-elective patients and 150,000 outpatients each year with the help of 2,900 staff and 400 volunteers. As a general hospital, it covers most forms of medical care including A&E and maternity.

Last year, recognising the need for a dedicated dementia ward, the hospital trust applied for and won a grant of around £250,000 from the King's Fund to retrofit an existing wing of the hospital so that it was dementia-friendly. In essence, this means that anyone with dementia coming to the hospital for other physical ailments would have a place that reflected their additional needs. The ward opened in April.

An integral part of the grant application was to build a dementia garden outside the ward, which covers three sides of a quadrangle and covers about 15 square metres. It means that patients are able to use the space safely and provides year-round access. The idea behind having a garden is that it invokes the familiarity of being at home. Dementia sufferers can feel imprisoned, but here they can walk out into the garden and be reminded of things they are used to.

The idea for the garden came from the senior nurse for older people and the Assistant Director of Patient Safety and was taken up by the Here to Care team. In order to understand the specific needs of dementia patients, head gardener Steve Marshall took an e-Learning course from the Social Care's Institute for Excellence, that [provides a general introduction to the disease and the experience of living with dementia](#). He also downloaded free resource sheets from the garden designer Kim Grove, [who specialises in dementia gardens](#).

The garden he came up with has been very carefully planned:

- It is secure, fenced off and private, with a gate that can only be unlocked from outside.
- It has a figure of eight path, so is easy for patients to walk around and back to where they started. It also stops them trying to get through the fence.
- There are several tactile figurines, chosen for their capacity to delight and prompt memory. For example, there is a young boy with a watering can watering plants that might invoke a childhood memory.
- A potting shed has been built, so patients can potter round it, feel safe and familiar and again perhaps help prompt memory.
- There is lots of seating, including a tree seat in the middle of the figure of eight.

- There is protective cover from the sun, wind and rain and rails to divert people around the windows.

As far as planting was concerned, in addition to fruit and vegetables, Steve put in three types of plants:

- sensory to invoke scent memory, eg lavender,
- hot colours which can help determine the mood of dementia patients, and
- cold colours to help cool them down when they get agitated or upset.

The project cost just under £10,000 and included £6,000 of the Kings Fund grant, as well as materials/labour from a local construction firm and additional donations from bodies and individuals associated with the hospital. It was successful, because:

- It was seen as an integral part of the hospital ward design with funding incorporated into the bid;
- Additional funding came through sponsorship and donations;
- It has resonated with hospital staff and visitors, who have seen the bigger picture as to why a garden could be so helpful
- The head gardener educated himself about dementia to inform his work.

The garden is quite low key, pulled together on a shoestring budget and with people's generosity. In an ideal world, Steve Marshall would have spent £30,000-40,000 on the dementia garden. However, as lack of funding is always going to be a problem, the plan is to build on the initial design in years to come. One interesting outcome has been the interest from other parts of the hospital and Steve has been asked to develop a stroke-specific garden for the stroke ward.

For anyone looking to develop their own dementia garden within a hospital setting, Steve Marshall will be giving an update on the garden at the [NHS Forest conference on 7th October](#). If you would like more information on the dementia ward or garden, [contact Steve](#).