

Abstract: "Green care" services for persons living with dementia

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Around 70,000 persons in Norway are estimated to have dementia and approximately half of them live in their own home (Engedal & Haugen 2009). This figure is expected to double within the coming 40 years (Ferri et al. 2005). Suitable health and care facilities for people with dementia are hence a huge professional and economic challenge for the municipalities, both now and in the near future. More than 180 Norwegian municipalities offer special day-time care options for people with dementia. Above 20 of these are farm-based (Eek & Kirkevold 2011). The national coverage is presently 9.3%, and a substantial effort is needed in order to make day-care activities available for all persons who want and need them. Hence a further strengthening of this field is highly recommended (Norwegian Directorate of Health 13.09.2011).

Experiences from Green care services based on international research (see e.g. Elings and Hassink 2006; de Bruin 2009) and also previous national projects (Strandli 2007) and mappings in Norway (Taranrød 2011) indicate that people with dementia living in their homes can benefit from day-care services on farms. This is very much in line with the conclusions of a recent Norwegian White Paper (NOU 2011:11). However, more research on this topic is warranted. We need more evidence-based knowledge concerning how the content and organization of Green care activities and the farm setting influence the users. It is also important to know how the activities may take the specific Norwegian national context into account (Strandli 2007). Such knowledge may contribute to good care options for the municipalities, the users and their next-of-kin.

The Ministry of Health and Care Services maintains that day-care activities to a large extent constitute a missing link in the chain of care services (circular/"rundskriv" no. 1-5/2007). According to this circular the municipalities should ensure that culture, a diversity of daily activities, and well-being as central elements in a comprehensive dementia care service. In a state-of-the-art report from the Norwegian Directorate of Health (13.09.2011), a preliminary summary of work on the Dementia Plan 2015 is provided. This report states that the rate of coverage of day-care offers designed for persons with dementia has increased in recent years, but is still far below what is needed. In a recent White paper on a new national strategy for Green care (2012) published by The Ministry of Agriculture and Food and the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, a need for evidence-based research on Green care services is stressed. There is widespread support for this work in other ministries as well, and with this strategic plan the government aims to further develop and strengthen Green care services.

Some studies support the assumption that physical surroundings may have a direct influence on socialization and the social life of persons living with dementia, that facilities with home-like characteristics are better for persons with dementia and other frail elderly (Hauge 2004), that facilities with a homelike physical surroundings "invites" people with dementia to seek and remain in the social community, while long corridors contributes to unrest and apraxia (Bergland & Kirkevold 2011), and that the physical surroundings influence the very work and work organization of staff serving people living with dementia (Jacobsen 2010). A farm, although also a unit for production, may be said to possess important home-like characteristics, where buildings not originally design for health purposes, represent a meaningful architectural frame for care. Both the buildings and outdoor areas on the farm represent a recognizable and meaningful non-medical context with elements which may stimulate activities, memory work and conversations (Strandli 2007; De Bruin 2009). The wider surroundings of the farm enhances easy access to natural surroundings as well, and may positively affect the health and well-being of persons with dementia (Bergland & Kirkevold 2011), although one must recognize that too little is known about the influence on farm-related elements on those persons (Berget & Braastad 2008).

Place matters for health and well-being (Cattell et al. 2008), and care farm provides for therapeutic landscapes, and could be used both as a physical arena for assessment of physical or cognitive function

(Geurts AC et al. 1991), as a treatment arena for people with dementia or other acquired brain injuries (haemorrhages, tumours, sequela), or maybe more importantly, as a recuperative landscape for social participation, community building, social interaction and well-being in normalized everyday environments (Hassink et al. 2010; Sudmann and Henriksbø 2011). Farms provide places for community building amongst participants, and between farmers, volunteers and participants (Hassink et al. 2010). Participants particularly value the normalized daily round of everyday living, the informal social interaction and ambience, and their integration and involvement in a local community.

The report "*Kunnskapsbehov og forskningsstatus for Inn på tunet*" (Berget and Braastad 2008) concludes that there is a strong need for evidence-based research on Green care services. In particular, the report calls for research perspectives that include the broader range of resources within the agricultural sector, from woodland and other natural resources to farm animals, plants and human resources. The research needs to investigate the experiences of various user groups related to the various farm activities and programmes, and, more broadly, physical and mental health and quality of life among the participants. An important aspect is to analyze the significance of the roles performed by the farmer and his/her family, the organization of meals and routines, nature and architectural surroundings, and other environmental factors on the experience of well-being and health among the frail elderly participants (ibid.).

Through a broad multidisciplinary approach, we plan a project which aims to provide new knowledge of the experiences of and effects on persons living with dementia and their next-of-kin by so-called Green care (farm based) services. The project combines a survey of all Green care facilities in Norway with an exploratory multi-site case-oriented study of a smaller selection of farms, aiming at creating an enhanced knowledge base for planning, organizing and developing apt care services for persons with dementia. The project involves a comparative dimension, where Green care services will be compared to "ordinary" day-care services for persons living with dementia.

This planned project is based on a pilot project in 2011 run jointly by the Church City Mission Oslo (SKBO, project management) and the Centre for Care Research – Western Norway (SOFV, scientific responsibility). The pilot project, titled «Green care as a model for care work among people with dementia in future care services» ("*Grønn omsorg som en modell for tilbud til mennesker med demens i fremtidens omsorgstjeneste*"), has been supported by a grant from Regionale Forskningsfond – Hovedstaden.

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