



KEY POINT SUMMARY

OBJECTIVES

This research explored residential aged care (RAC) workplace design features that influence how RAC staff feel valued, productive, safe, like they belong, and connected.

Workplace design for the Australian residential aged care workforce

Naccarella, L., Newton, C., Pert, A., Seeman, K., Williams, R., Sellick, K., Dow, B., 2018 | *Australasian Journal on Aging, Volume 41, Issue N/A, Pages 1-8*

Key Concepts/Context

This study explored the impact of the workplace physical environment on staff in a residential aged care (RAC) facility in Australia. There is a current and projected shortage of RAC workers in Australia. Historically, research has focused on traditional methods to support the RAC workforce, including staff recruitment, staff wages, funding training, career creation, regulations, work design, staff conditions, staff retention, workforce planning, and new models of care. This study sought to determine the impact of workplace design features on staff.

Methods

A multistage qualitative research approach was used including 1) Photo-elicitation, an ethnographic method using photographs to prompt group discussions with RAC staff, 2) individual interviews with senior RAC facility directors, and 3) validity testing with an advisory committee.

The setting was one RAC facility with 100 residents and 180 full- and part-time staff.

The data collection involved four stages:

- Stage 1 - Photo-Elicitation: Staff were asked to take five to six pictures of places in their workplace that made them or did not make them feel valued, productive, safe, like they belonged, and/or connected with other staff.
- Stage 2 - RAC Staff Discussion: RAC staff who took photographs were invited to participate in a group discussion facilitated by the lead researcher.



- Stage 3 - Management Individual Interviews: The RAC facility executive director and care director participated in individual semi-structured interviews regarding what workplace design features worked well or did not work well, and what they believe would improve the workplace design for their staff.
- Stage 4 - Advisory Committee Validation Group Discussion: An advisory group reviewed completed after first two visits to assess the preliminary findings to ensure that the research process and outcome were informed by aged care policy, practice, and research.

Data analysis methods: Group discussions and individual interviews were analyzed using the constant comparative thematic analysis approach.

Findings

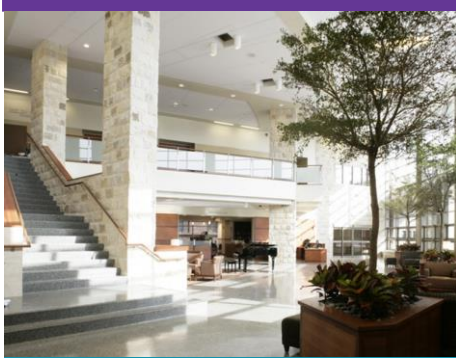
From review of the photographs taken by staff and group discussions, four themes emerged as to what workplace design features matter: 1) Home-like environment, 2) Access to outdoor spaces, 3) Access to safe, open, and comfortable workspaces, and 4) indoor quality environment.

The RAC management interview with the RAC facility care director elicited two themes as to what worked well: 1) homelike environment, 2) safe and open workplaces. In addition, two themes for areas that didn't work well or needed improvement included 1) the lack of staff space (e.g., lack of water dispenser, cutlery in the staff room), and 2) lack of comfort spaces (e.g., comfortable furnishings in the staff room).

The validation with the advisory committee revealed their agreement with the importance of a home-like environment; they approved funding to develop an environmental comfort model within RAC facilities to allow staff to assess their workspace environment, and they planned to engage and empower staff in future changes to the workplace design.

Limitations

The authors identified the following limitations: 1) the risk of bias in staff selected to participate in the photo-elicitation process, 2) restricting the staff from taking photos of residents' rooms due to privacy issues, yet these are areas where they work, and 3) the study took place in one RAC facility that was relatively new and modern.



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Design Implications

The residential aged care facilities (RACs) must focus on the traditional workforce measures (e.g., funding, training) and workplace design.

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