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Food In Later Life

Food In Later Life (FILL) aims to provide an international, intercultural, multidisciplinary and intergenerational perspective on how the preparation of food and eating should change over the years to accommodate changes in nutritional needs and living styles.

 FILL aims to provide an international, intercultural, multidisciplinary and intergenerational perspective on a specific cultural aspect: how the preparation of food and the rituals associated with eating should change in time to accommodate the changes in nutritional needs and living styles of people. FILL focuses on those who, due to age or diseases, have to substantially change their nutritional style. The target groups include adults caring for their relatives, volunteers active in NGOs, aging people and educators working in the fields of social work and healthcare. Different cultures, ages, lifestyles and expectations will be taken into consideration.

A number of simple and effective solutions are available. Project partners aim is gather data about them and to offer concise information to those who are involved, directly or indirectly, in the preparation and presentation of meals. To this end, FILL partners are producing textual, visual and audiovisual informational products.

Transnational Meeting in Genoa

The fourth all-partner transnational meeting was hosted by ALPHA Association on January 22nd and 23rd, 2015. The meeting included a half-day workshop in which participants learned about swallowing problems that frail elderly people encounter. The workshop was divided into three parts. The first was theoretical. It covered elements of anatomy, physiology and pathology in order to understand how swallowing occurs normally and how it may be affected by different types of disorders. In the second part, participants were shown and practiced in a hands-on session, how to choose and adapt food according to the severity of swallowing disorders. The workshop proceeded with a teaching session on how to test and monitor dysphagia. The third part of the workshop involved answering questions from a list partners had sent previously. A discussion followed about the many competencies needed and skills practiced during the workshop. Talk included applying the learned skills in daily caring activities for various professions. ↪

In the afternoon, another training session was dedicated to ethical principles applied to feeding people who experience dysphagia or who require palliative care. A presentation that was made raised several questions with which professionals are confronted in their daily activities in nursing



homes but also in hospitals and during home care. A discussion

among participants helped clarify several aspects of this complex topic. The session aimed at emphasising the complexity and the necessity to consider each case separately, taking into account the needs of the patient as well as those of family members and of the involved professional carers.

When Nutrition is Dependent Upon Others

It is important to bring about knowledge exchanges on cultural and social aspects linked to nutrition in later life. Non-formal learning paths are needed to clearly explain to all those involved in the preparation of food for others on how to adapt food to ensure that the mealtime remains a meaningful and pleasant experience at any age. Strategies used to make the meal time an enriched experience can transform it from a routine or task, to a positive ritual for the individual.

While numerous studies address the nutritional needs of elderly people (i.e. The modified Food Guide Pyramid for the elderly) less attention has been paid to observing the cultural and social aspects of food or to providing carers with clear and simple information on how to modify the preparation of food according to the changing needs of the person. FILL therefore does not specifically focus on the nutritional aspects addressed by the medical field (geriatricians, nutritionists, speech therapists); rather, it refers to how to prepare and serve food to people in later life. Too often these aspects are left to common sense: FILL's results are helping those who wish to acquire or update their skills, knowledge and competencies.

In today's societies those in the later stages of life have wide ranging

expectations surrounding Food. These variances include: individuals having very traditional expectations in relation to food, to individuals that have experienced a significant cultural shift and are very attentive to what they eat, and to those who are less interested in food and whereby the customs, rituals and experiences have become diminished.

Life is complicated when people do not eat what they choose, buy and cook, but rather eat what is given them by others. ALPHA Association is particularly interested in the problems of older people who have difficulties in feeding themselves, have problems chewing and swallowing, and resulting from advanced age, illness or disability.

The diet for people in later life requires special attention given the multiple and often complex issues that they experience. Food should be soft, simple, easily digestible, and easily chewable.

For example, when people have Alzheimer's, providing nutritious snacks in between meals to boost nutrient intake is important, as often it is difficult to encourage these people to sit with other family members or residents in residential care units at mealtimes. For older people living alone with a low income, a healthy diet may be a challenge; in reality, many face risks of de-nutrition even if their own perception is of eating adequately.

In day centres, residential care units and private homes, often those who prepare and serve the meals are overburdened by several factors including: lack of specific knowledge on how to encourage food and nutrition intake by those who experience problems, too many residents needing attention, shortage of personnel, and a lack of proper, appropriate training.

While much information is available on nutritional aspects of food and on the specific needs related to some diseases or incidents (Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, stroke), less information is readily available on effective strategies to make food appealing and appetising through choice, preparation and presentation.



Demonstration of food consistencies and appropriateness in relation to swallowing problems by Antonella Giusti (MD) during a FILL workshop in Genoa.

The Nursing Home Hosting the Genoa Meeting

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The FILL project partnership meeting was held in Genoa in January 2015. It was organised in the premises of the Nursing Homes San Francesco and Santa Chiara, which are located in the hills of Genoa, in a large park with overviews of the city. These Institutes offer highly integrated socio-health care. They work with the Liguria Region and Local Health Service (ASL3 – Genovese) accreditation system and they provide therapeutic and rehabilitation services. The Nursing Homes are located in two buildings built in the 1960s. They were renovated and modified to become more suitable to the functions of Health Residence Assisted Maintenance (Istituto San Francesco, where people with a higher level of disability are hosted) and Protected Residence (Istituto S. Chiara, hosting less dependent people, requiring a lighter level of assistance). Clients include elderly, disabled people and people with psycho and or physical pathologies. Both institutes are three-floor buildings and have rooms with one or more beds. Customers can choose the rooms according to availability at the time of admission. The Nursing homes have a kitchen for preparing meals, living rooms for socialisation and, at the Institute of San Francesco, a large air-conditioned veranda. In both buildings there is a large garden equipped with ramps to facilitate

access for disabled people using a wheelchair. The San Francesco Institute has 55 beds and Santa Chiara Institute has 17 beds.

The Nursing Homes offer a wide set of health services including: professional medical and nursing assistance, specific support held by psychologist, speech therapist, physiotherapist and animator; they also have a laboratory test services (blood tests and culture) and provide drugs included in the Formulary Pharmaceutical of the Regional Health Service. In agreement with Local Health Service (ASL 3 Genovese) is provided an ambulance transport service to hospitals and rehabilitation institutes when needed. Customised prosthetic supplies are available for the hosts and are provided by the ASL with separate authorisation. The Nursing Homes further offer hotel services such as: supplying bed linen including changing and washing; laundry and ironing personal clothes services; meal preparation with a daily and weekly choice; newspapers and magazine delivery service.



The FILL project partnership meeting was organised in the Nursing Homes to show the partners an example of good practice, as the social and health services provided are above the standard required by the Local Health Service. The intensity of medical assistance is more than what is required by the existing law parameters and it guarantees the presence of professional medical personnel for between eight hours to ten hours a day in the Nursing Homes; furthermore, night and holiday medical availability is guaranteed. Other over-standard services include: occupational therapy, neuro-psychological and speech therapy consultancies. According to the FILL project partners' point of view, another important service is a dietetic personalised service guaranteed by a speech therapist who once a week works in the Nursing Homes together with the medical and nursing personnel, as well as staff working in the kitchen. The aim is to evaluate the residual skills of the patients in order to modify diets and, at the same time, provide information and explanations to both guests and their families.

Transnational Partner Meeting in Graz

June 4–5, 2015

The fifth all-partner transnational meeting was hosted by uniT on June 4th and 5th, 2015. In a workshop on Thursday uniT provided an overview of the Austrian care system for elderly people. Based on this input the participants compared the Austrian/Styrian system with the system in their home countries/regions.

A screening of the documentary “Daheim ist nicht daheim” followed the workshop. The documentary shows residents of an elderly home in Graz talking about their former life and their current situation. The aim of the film is to portray elderly people as individuals, with a lot of memories and a full spectrum of hopes and desires. In the following discussion the importance of the individualisation of people living in care homes was emphasised as well as the necessity to learn about their individual needs or to appreciate their rich memories.

On Friday all the participants met in an elderly home of the Caritas in Graz St. Peter. They took part in a project called “Food and Words Snacks” together with the members of the KUNSTLABOR Graz and people living in the elderly home. The elderly people sat at a nicely decorated table and shared their memories of food, Food of days gone by, dishes they were used to eat as children, and

memories of the preparation of special meals. Additionally, the KUNSTLABOR team served small dishes in accordance with the elderly’s favourite meals. They had asked the elderly people beforehand about their wishes on what to eat on this occasion. After the “Food and Word Snacks” event the participants of the workshop exchanged their views on eating habits, the cultural and personal context of food and cooking and the change in life habits, that are taking place in an elderly home. One of the main issues was to discuss how to take care of elderly people properly valuing their cultural and personal eating habits.

The workshops ended with a guided tour in the elderly home. Franz Pechmann, the director of the home explained the institute’s



philosophy, which is based on the ideas of Erwin Böhm. His vision was to make the residents feel as much as home as possible. Not only does the Caritas Home avoid a sterile atmosphere that is often the result of too much visible nursery equipment, it furthermore encourages its residents to continue their former daily routine of doing household chores or handicrafts. In the following discussion, the director explained in more detail how they try to implement these ideas in everyday life in the elderly home.



During the guided tour of the Caritas elderly home

“Swallowing is not a function, it is an ability” *

All functions of the mouth are automatic. Dysphagia is related to brain problems and to the mouth. The mouth is a source of pleasure throughout our lives. Mouth muscles are used differently for different functions. If an elderly person has breathing problems, the same person will also have problems swallowing. In two seconds a person breaths three times (swallowing takes from 2 to 3 sec.), enough time for saliva to enter the lungs during that short time when the phalange is open. Swallowing is not a function, it is an ability. Dinner is more difficult than lunch as

people are tired by the end of the day. Different foods may be better in the evening to enable easier eating.



*Antonella Giusti (MD) explaining the physiology of swallowing during the FILL meeting in Genoa.

More on fill-project.eu

Credits

FILL Partners



FILL is an initiative brought to you by several European organisations that are involved in adult learning and education. By forming a Partnership these organisations are sharing knowledge and working together to offer a comprehensive understanding of issues related to nutritional changes that take place as one gets older, plus offer instructional materials to support a lifelong pleasurable experience when eating. This initiative was made possible thanks to grants from the European Commission under the Grundtvig Partnerships Lifelong Learning Programme.

Disclaimer

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