

Dementia and the Environment Research Initiative

Therapeutic Kitchens in Dementia Care Settings



a report of research by
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Therapeutic Kitchens in Dementia Care Settings

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Abstract

“Therapeutic kitchens,” also referred to as “country kitchens,” “domestic kitchens,” or activity-based kitchens,” have been cited as supportive spaces for residents with dementia. The purpose of this research is to identify physical features that are typically included in therapeutic kitchen design and to explore how these features support daily use of the space for residents and staff. The study included two phases of data collection. In the first phase, four half-day site visits, consisting of interviews and observation, were conducted in northern Ohio at facilities with a therapeutic kitchen. For the second phase, a two page questionnaire regarding therapeutic kitchens was distributed to 631 nursing homes and assisted living facilities throughout the United States. Several major themes were identified across the four case studies, and 116 questionnaires were returned. Results suggest that universal design principles, certain appliances and safety features, as well as homelike imagery should be incorporated in therapeutic kitchen design. In addition, activities that are familiar but more recreational in nature, as opposed to household chores, are recommended. Staff education appears to be an important concern since there is some confusion concerning the definition and use of therapeutic kitchens. Finally, cooking one or more meals in therapeutic kitchens is suggested to make these spaces more integral to meal service systems. Although the study was exploratory and descriptive in nature, the results serve as a foundation for additional research.

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