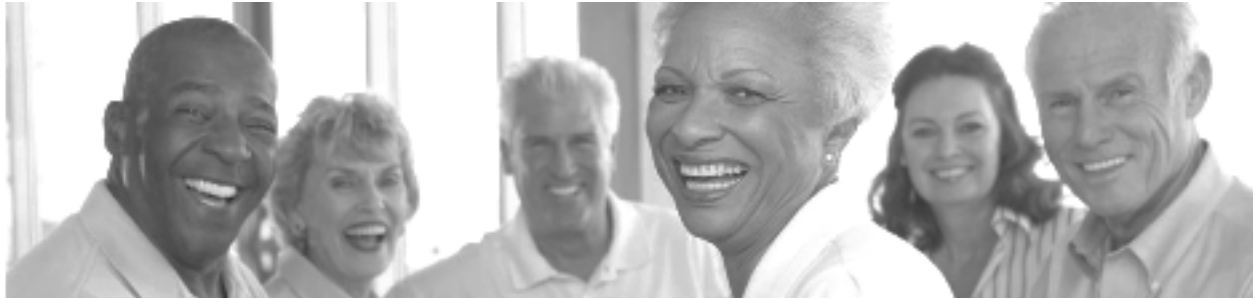


Project Proposal

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CSE 440 AC, Spring 2017*



The Problem

Social connectedness is an important factor in quality of life for the elderly-- particularly in nursing homes. However, there are a number of barriers these residents face in connecting with each other. A survey of Australian nursing home residents indicates that they do not have the agency to self-select friendships and that their friendship expectations are unfulfilled (Casey et al.). Many residents report that social opportunities at the home don't align with their expectations of friendships. Age difference and cognitive impairment serve as barriers to sustaining friendships among residents. The focus of this project will be to create more intimate connections between residents within a particular nursing home.

Background

Social isolation can lead to loneliness, lowered self-esteem, and mental health issues. Maintaining good social interaction can be particularly important for residents in nursing homes, who are often estranged from the rest of society. A study in French nursing homes shows that developing social ties with fellow residents improves integration into retirement homes- "Feeling connected, secure in the relationships with others, and integrated as an individual to the group contributes to enhance leisure practice, self-determined motivation, and finally adaptation to life environment" (Altintas et al.). Participation in leisure activities helps support social connection by promoting interactions with peers and developing a sense of

community among individuals. Furthermore, while social connections with peers are not necessary for all residents, they require facilitation and are unlikely to develop spontaneously (Bergland and Kirkevald). Currently, there are a few technological solutions out there try to connect the elderly. Stitch is a social network for seniors above fifty that helps members find friends and partners (O’Hear). Tapestry is another networking app that helps keep the elderly connected with their family members with a simple layout (Tepper). While these solutions tend to focus on remote connections with those in their age group and family, they do not address relationships within the nursing home environment.

Considerations

Our initial focus was on connecting individuals living in retirement communities with friends and family. Feedback from fellow students and TAs revealed that our proposal was not specific enough in identifying a target group and problem. Looking back at the research we had done, we noticed that connecting nursing home residents with each other is a well-documented problem that seems to not have been addressed. Thus, we decided to shift our focus to creating more intimate connections between individuals in nursing homes with their peers to build on existing research.

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