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**Understanding Factors Affecting Optimal Nutrition and  
Hydration for People Living in Specialised Dementia Care Units:  
A Qualitative Study of Caregivers' Perceptions**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of

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## Abstract

**Background:** Worldwide, 35.6 million people have dementia. The current aging world population means prevalence of dementia is expected to almost double every 20 years. Weight loss, undernutrition and dehydration are common in people with dementia especially among those who reside in specialised dementia care units (SDCUs). There are currently no foodservice guidelines specifically for SDCUs in New Zealand.

**Aim:** To understand factors affecting optimal nutrition and hydration for individuals living in SDCUs. **Objectives:** To explore the perceptions of caregivers regarding factors influencing intake of food and fluids, and to provide a range of potential recommendations for foodservice providers.

**Methods:** Qualitative descriptive study, using semi-structured interviews with 11 caregivers at 2 SDCUs. Data were analysed using a general inductive approach.

**Findings:** Environmental factors (relating to the surroundings of the dining environment, the social aspects to dining, and the need for and provision of support with mealtime activities), and individual factors (appetite, food appeal, and cognitive and functional abilities) affect food and fluid intake in people with dementia living in SDCUs.

**Conclusion:** Factors affecting the nutrition and hydration status of people living in SDCUs are complex and inter-related. Organisations providing specialised dementia care, their staff, and foodservice providers can take a number of steps to ensure optimal nutrition and hydration for the people they care for.

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## Table of contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>List of Tables.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>List of Figures .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Abbreviations .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>1.0 Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Researcher’s Interest.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1.2 Background and Justification for the Research .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1.3 Research Aim and Objectives.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1.4 Structure of the Thesis.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>1.5 Summary.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.0 Literature Review.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2.1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2.2 Background to Dementia and Nutritional Issues for People with Dementia ....</b>	<b>12</b>
2.2.1 What is dementia? .....	12
2.2.2 Prevalence and incidence of dementia .....	13
2.2.3 Residential care for people with dementia.....	15
2.2.4 Foodservice in ARRC facilities including SDCUs .....	15
2.2.5 Dementia - dietary intake and nutritional status.....	16
<b>2.3 Dementia and Eating .....</b>	<b>19</b>
2.3.1 Introduction .....	19
2.3.2 Changes to eating as dementia progresses .....	20
2.3.3 Models relating to mealtime difficulties.....	22
2.3.4 Factors affecting nutritional status of people with dementia .....	25
2.3.5 Person-centred care.....	26
2.3.6 Individual.....	27
2.3.7 Social .....	35
2.3.8 Cultural.....	39
2.3.9 Physical environment.....	42
2.3.10 Assistance.....	45
<b>2.4 Summary – What the Literature Tells Us .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>2.5 Limitations of this Literature Review .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>3.0 Research Design.....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>3.1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>3.2 Methodology and Rationale – A background to the Study Design.....</b>	<b>50</b>
3.2.1 A qualitative approach .....	50
3.2.2 Qualitative descriptive methodology.....	51

<b>3.3 Execution of the Study.....</b>	<b>52</b>
3.3.1 Ethical considerations .....	52
3.3.2 The sampling process and accessing participants .....	57
3.3.3 Data collection – semi-structured interviews .....	60
3.3.4 Sample size and data saturation .....	62
3.3.5 Data transcription .....	62
3.3.6 Data analysis – A general inductive approach .....	63
3.3.7 Presenting the findings .....	67
3.3.8 Research quality – validity and rigour.....	70
<b>3.4 Summary.....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>4.0 Findings .....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>4.1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>4.2 “It’s about the individual” .....</b>	<b>75</b>
4.2.1 Appetite.....	76
4.2.2 Appeal .....	81
4.2.3 Ability .....	93
<b>4.3 “It’s about the environment” .....</b>	<b>102</b>
4.3.1 Surroundings .....	102
4.3.2 Social .....	106
4.3.3 Support.....	113
<b>4.5 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>5.0 Discussion .....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>5.1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>5.2 Summary of Findings .....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>5.3 Discussion of Findings.....</b>	<b>122</b>
5.3.1 Individual factors affecting nutritional status.....	123
5.3.2 Environmental factors affecting nutritional status.....	128
5.3.3 Researchers thoughts.....	133
<b>5.5 Recommendations for SDCUs and foodservice providers .....</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>5.6 Limitations and strengths of the present study .....</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>5.7 Future research .....</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>5.8 Concluding statement .....</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>6.0 References .....</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>7.0 Appendices .....</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>Appendix A: Ethics Approval Letter .....</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet.....</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>Appendix C: Participant Consent Form .....</b>	<b>161</b>
<b>Appendix D: Interview Schedule of Questions .....</b>	<b>162</b>
<b>Appendix E: Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement.....</b>	<b>164</b>

## List of Tables

<b>Table</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Page</b>
3.1	The coding process in inductive analysis	67
3.2	Themes and example extracts	69

## List of Figures

<b>Figure</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Page</b>
2.1	Model of feeding difficulty	24
2.2	Model of mealtime difficulty	25
2.3	Key themes from the literature affecting nutrition and hydration status of people living in SDCUs	26
4.1	Factors affecting nutrition and hydration status of people living in SDCUs	75

## Abbreviations

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
ARRC	Age-related residential care
SDCU	Specialised dementia care unit
WHO	World Health Organisation
AD	Alzheimer's disease
BMI	Body mass index
CDR scale	Clinical Dementia Rating scale
NASC	Needs Assessment and Service Coordination
MUHEC	Massey University Human Ethics Committee