

Enhancing the Voices of Older People with Complex Care Needs by Using Creative Approaches to Build the Evidence

27th of May and 30th of June, University of Surrey, UK



This online workshop was held over two half-day sessions held a month apart. The workshop was organised by Professor Caroline Nicholson (School of Health Sciences) and Dr Richard Green (School of Health Sciences). The workshop consisted of invited panel speakers, breakout sessions, recordings from older people living with complex care needs, and creative activity practical sessions.

Workshop Aims

Older people with complex care needs are the main users of health and social care services yet their voices, and the voices of those close to them, are underrepresented in the research process. Involving older people with complex care needs in evidence building is crucial if our research is to be meaningful and useful to improving the experience, quality of life and services provided to older people in the last phase of life. This requires a shift away from the dominant modes of knowledge production to creative methods which emphasise multidisciplinary and multi-sensory approaches. The aims of this workshop were to:

- Introduce, discuss and provide opportunities to experience creative practices that support the enhancement of the voices of older people with complex care needs in evidence building within health and social care from a range of perspectives.
- Create and sustain collaborations with participants so we can learn from each other; to support and shape work that aims to place older people's voices at the heart of our research/evidence/practice.
- Share resources to start a web-based resource library for creative approaches in research and practice with older people with complex care needs.

Event Themes

Workshop Session One

The first event session in May began with an 'in conversation' recording with Dr Katherine Froggatt reflecting on how to communicate and engage effectively and use creativity when interacting with her

mother Alison. This set the scene for the introducing our expert panel Dr Sarah Russell, Dr Aileen Collier, and Professor David Frohlich to guide us through their reflections on the key questions for the session one of the workshop:

- Why do we need to enhance the voices of older people?
- What is influencing my creative approaches and how am I working creatively now?

Why do we need to enhance the voices of older people?

The expert panel discussed the difficulties with hearing the voices of those with complex physical and mental health needs and emphasised the requirements of having the time and skills to do this well. Dr Aileen Collier discussed how we need innovative methodologies to address the complexity of older people's lived experiences and care needs, illustrating this with examples from a reflexive video ethnography method. Further, Dr Sarah Russell drew on literature highlighting the importance of enhancing older voices based on rights-based arguments of human rights to having agency, equity, equality, and visibility.

What is influencing my creative approaches and how am I working creatively now?

The expert panel then discussed the theories and approaches that underpin their use of creativity in evidence-building. Dr Sarah Russell introduced the concept of 'critical creativity', an approach that requires a cognitive critique of deconstructing and reconstructing the knowledge that is co-produced with older people, thereby offering a theoretical basis for embedding creative approaches and practices in research. All the panel discussed their current creative practices, the ways they were producing knowledge, and examined what kind of knowledge they were producing, as we saw with Dr Collier's reflexive video ethnography, and Professor David Frohlich's discussed his use of technology co-design methods within a focus group framework.

Workshop Session Two

In the second workshop session in June, the emphasis of the workshop was on applying learnings to date in working practices. Responding to and designing the second session using participants' feedback during the breakout sessions and following the event, the voices of older people were brought into the room more with a short custom film of older people with complex care needs talking about their needs from their own perspectives. The second session also opened with an 'in conversation' recording with Wendy Parkin, an author who spoke about her relationship with creativity as an older woman. Also in response to participants' feedback, two creative activity practical sessions were run by invited speakers Gill Phillips and Dr Jed Jerwood for participants to trial creative practices through real examples. For the first session, participants were invited to wear different hats while as a group participating in a virtual boardgame, custom-made for thinking critically about care. For the second, participants took a stone from outside and through drawing and talking found new ways to relate to and understand the stone and in turn to communicate with each other. The session concluded with a 'Now what?' session, which encouraged participants to carry the ideas discussed forward into their practice by writing an email to their future selves, as well as discussing future priorities with the rest of the group.

Evaluation

The workshop was attended by more than 60 people across both sessions (42 people in session one and 31 in session two) and included healthcare professionals, community-based practitioners, and researchers from the UK, across Europe and New Zealand.

Feedback from delegates, as the following quotes from the IAS evaluation form illustrate:

“Excellent speakers; really interesting and informative workshop. I really enjoyed and benefited from attending.”

“Well organised and a nice variety of research methods presented.”

“The use of the chat facility was good – especially in terms of sharing resources.”

At the end of the second session there was widespread interest in an event poll for being part of a lasting researcher network and for the potential to be involved in a collaborative paper, the first receiving a unanimous ‘yes’ and the second receiving a ‘yes’ from all except two participants.

Outcomes and Next Steps

Key outcome measures for this workshop were (1) to create a collaborative network from workshop participants of evidence-builders who place older people’s voices at the heart of their research, evidence, and practice; and (2) to sustain and grow this network by creating sustainable digital hub to share and coordinate our work.

An engaged network of people with a shared interest in the research area has been formed, with all delegates now given access to an [online resource hub](#), created from resources shared in the workshops. This an open resource where ideas, literature, and best practice knowledge can be shared and grown by members holistically. The workshop learnings are also contributing to the direction and design development of a new [living and dying well](#) research strand within the School of Health Sciences, which when finalised will report on workshop proceeding. This new space (currently under development), working within existing internal University of Surrey online infrastructure, will help us to signpost our new programme of work externally and to new collaborative partners (some identified through the workshop) in other disciplines at Surrey involved in ageing research, including sociology, psychology, tourism and electronic engineering.

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