

Research Paper: Assisted Living Considerations for the Aged

Kimberly K. Loutzenheiser

Family and Consumer Sciences, Liberty University

FACS 300: Interior Design 3

Professor Layell

January 18, 2024

Throughout the past couple of years, there has been a rise in the need for good design in assisted living facilities (ALFs) across the US. These facilities are defined by the Virginia Department of Social Service as “non-medical residential settings that provide or coordinate personal and health care services, 24-hour supervision, and assistance for the care of four or more adults who are aged, infirm or disabled.” (Assisted Living Facilities (ALF) 2024) There are many different disabilities that these facilities care for but there are some that can truly benefit from good design. However, there tends to be a lack in this overall area of these facilities. A study on the development of a user-centered design framework for palliative care was conducted by Delta University in Egypt and it states: “Amongst the parameters measured for satisfaction in the palliative care experience, the aspect of architecture and design is often overlooked, although it plays a vital role and deals with the overall quality of life and may help in enhancing the End-of-Life quality experience.” (Abdel-Razek, S. A. 2022). By using basic principles of architecture and interior design, these issues can be solved. This paper will focus on three different unique needs of the elderly, memory care, ambulatory care, and diminished vision.

Regarding memory care, there are many risks and factors added to this type of case that can be helped by using room design and a specific layout of a certain floor. These risks may include and are not limited to slips, falls, wandering off, lack of activities and activity rooms, unusual behavior that comes from dementia, and other safety issues. In a Ph.D. study titled “Redesigning Memory Care in the COVID-19 Era” Farhana Ferdous from Howard University in Australia states that “Sometimes memory care is embedded within nursing homes, assisted living facilities or LTCFs; isolating each specialized unit within the care facility with dedicated entry/exit points instead of a single main lobby might be a great design strategy to follow in future.” (Ferdous, F. 2021) This study helps us to understand why it is super important for

elderly dementia patients to have consistent living situations. One way this can be solved is by keeping each patient's room the same the whole time that they are there, no matter their stage of care. Another main common area should be consistent is that there should be one entry and exit point that is well monitored to avoid wandering off. Having these designs in place can help with patient's familiarization in their surroundings even with an ongoing condition.

Ambulatory care is a great option for many of the aging population that maybe cannot live by themselves or drive themselves places. This means that they can function at a walking capacity but have limited movement around a space. For this type of care, it is very important to create a good, safe outdoor and indoor space that the patients can enjoy walking around in and moving about. A study looking at the effects of a biophilic design in a hospice context states that "In order to maintain the physical and psychological health of hospice healthcare professionals, the workspace should be designed following their responsibilities related to the physical and emotional care giving of patients." (Untaru, E.-N., Han, H., David, A., & Chi, X. 2024) Both healthcare and patients can benefit from a biophilic design. Green spaces and open floorplans aid in the emotional well-being of everyone in the space. Big Windows can also add a great persona to a room by giving natural sunlight and bringing in a view from the outside. A great design choice for an ambulatory care center would be to add outdoor walkways as well as indoor greenery spaces for both patients and staff to enjoy.

The other focus that can greatly aid from good interior design would be diminished vision. Patients who experience this have issues with mobility, independence, cognitive deficits, social isolation, and poor mental health. These can all create great challenges to the health and the quality of life of these individuals. One of the main factors that can help with this is the lighting in a room. Having control of the sunlight and being able to dim the lights to the specific patient's needs in a

room is mandatory. This is a quote from a study about lighting and design for people with sight loss: “In relation to sunlight, most of the specialist guidance on design for people with sight loss focuses on the need to enable occupants to control the amount of sunlight that enters their home through the use of blinds, in order to reduce glare.”(Lewis, A., & Torrington, J. 2013) While we may not be able to change the lighting in a common area for each patient’s needs, we can certainly control the lighting to a consistent but safe setting. One way to do this is by using special light-filtering blinds. The company SWFcontract creates commercial blinds that are environmentally friendly and easy to use and maintain. These would be a great option for any assisted living home that is looking to create a space comfortable for their patients with vision loss of any kind. (Precision Plus Manual Solar Shades: Industrial roller shades)

In conclusion, memory care, ambulatory care, and diminished vision care all greatly benefit from good interior design in any assisted living facility. Overall, each care facility should be laid out practically, with easy access for the patients and the staff that are there. John 13:34-35 says “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (*English Standard Bible*, 2001/2016, John 13:34-35) As Christians we are called to go out to the ends of the earth to love one another, caring for all kinds of people and being thoughtful in the way we design anything is a way that we can show the love of Christ to them.

References

- VDSS. (n.d.). *Assisted Living Facilities (ALF)*. Assisted Living Facilities (ALF) – Virginia Department of Social Services.

[https://www.dss.virginia.gov/facility/alf.cgi#:~:text=Assisted%20living%20facilities%20\(ALFs\)%20are,are%20aged%2C%20infirm%20or%20disabled.](https://www.dss.virginia.gov/facility/alf.cgi#:~:text=Assisted%20living%20facilities%20(ALFs)%20are,are%20aged%2C%20infirm%20or%20disabled.)

- Abdel-Razek, S. A. (2022). Development of A User-Centered Design Framework for Palliative and Hospice Care Patients for a Better Quality of Life Experience. *International Journal of Environmental Science & Sustainable Development*, 7(1), 105–117.

<https://doi.org/10.21625/essd.v7i1.870>

- Ferdous, F. (2021). Redesigning Memory Care in the COVID-19 Era: Interdisciplinary Spatial Design Interventions to Minimize Social Isolation in Older Adults. *Journal of Aging & Social Policy*, 33(4/5), 555–569.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/08959420.2021.1924345>

- Untaru, E.-N., Han, H., David, A., & Chi, X. (2024). Biophilic Design and Its Effectiveness in Creating Emotional Well-Being, Green Satisfaction, and Workplace Attachment Among Healthcare Professionals: The Hospice Context. *Health Environments Research & Design Journal (HERD)* (Sage Publications, Ltd.), 17(1), 190–208. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19375867231192087>

- Lewis, A., & Torrington, J. (2013). Extra-care housing for people with sight loss: Lighting and design. *Lighting Research & Technology*, 45(3), 345–361.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1477153512450451>

- *English Standard Bible*. (2016). Literal Word. <https://esv.literalword.com/> (Original work published 2001)
- Precision Plus Manual Solar Shades: Industrial roller shades. SWFcontract. (n.d.). [https://www.swfcontract.com/products/solar-shades/manual-solar-shades/precision-plus-manual-solar-shades/ - overview](https://www.swfcontract.com/products/solar-shades/manual-solar-shades/precision-plus-manual-solar-shades/-overview)

