

use of medication of proven effectiveness, on cost grounds?

Erosion of trust

The problem lies with the political reasoning (or lack of it) behind the proposals, rather than the particular methods of economic analysis used by the HTA committee, although flaws in that analysis will probably form the basis of early challenges.

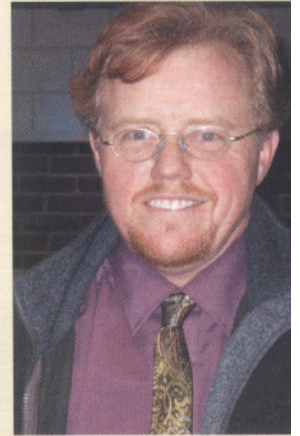
The HTA committee is right to argue that the manufacturers tend to overestimate the benefits of their products and underestimate the cost implications for the taxpayer. Sceptical examination of claims is the essence of science, and is to be applauded. However, in a democratic environment the decision to fund any activity from the public purse is not a technical task, based on cost-benefit analyses, but a political one in which many voices and interests contend.

We shall see how this plays out in the coming months, as yet another apparent "cut" in public provision is argued through the media, through the quangos and committees of government, and perhaps the courts.

The private worries in families, the saving of money for medical care, the re-growth of pessimism around dementia and the small conflicts between citizens and professionals may be quieter and less public, but perhaps more pervasive and long-lasting. Trust in good government and in professional decision-making is hard to restore, once lost, and every older person who thinks (rightly or not) that they are denied something because of their age reflects the erosion of such trust.

Reconnecting with nature

Garuth Eliot Chalfont (right) considers the role of nature in people's lives and its implications for the design of residential care facilities



ception of the building which they are living.

A study participant identifies themselves as a sc aged student will have perception reinforced b institutional design and l of the building, the daily tine, communal meals group activities. Import: they will act appropriate the school environ (responding to instruct which prevents auton activity such as standing gazing out of the wind venturing outside. This also begin to account fo extreme anguish some p feel at tea time when vented from returning ho

The research also con that people with dementi nature as a tool for expre their thoughts and emc metaphorically: *I like to birds on the lawn, not a long They don't let themselv poorly.* Participants in the are particularly skilled at in the moment and expre love and laughter. Natur play a role by enabling expression.

Ultimately the research ings will be applied to de tia care environments s architecture and natur designed in harmony to port heartfelt expression, tate joy and lift the s Comments or inquirie welcome.

Garuth Eliot Chalfont, MA, AS research assistant in the Sc Architecture, University of Sh UK and is currently working INDEPENDENT Project (Inves Enabling Environments for Peop Dementia), which explores the p for technology to improve au

There is evidence that maintaining a connection to nature is beneficial to quality of life and well-being for people with dementia, but how well do residential care environments facilitate this benefit?

Architectural research is under way which explores the person's need and desire for nature in their life, as well as the ability of the built environment to provide it. My research at the University of Sheffield will produce design guidance as well as an assessment tool for comparing residential environments for their ability to provide for their residents this beneficial connection to the natural world.

A residential care environment is a complex setting in which many factors enable or challenge a person's ability to connect to nature: care and management practice, various aspects of the building and the location, the availability of nature and habitat, human involvement, assistive technology and the abilities of the residents themselves. A purpose-built tool called PLANET (Person, Location, Architecture, Nature, Energy & Technology) is being developed and is useful for highlighting differences between settings.

Interviews with residents, focus groups with formal and informal carers, and observations of day to day life in residential care homes in the north of England continue to inform the research by investigating qualitatively the aspects that PLANET quantifies.

Findings so far underscore the interdisciplinary nature of the work and the complex factors to be overcome by a person with dementia if they are to establish contact with the natural world. For instance, the concept of 'time frame identity' describes the period in life that the person with dementia

Short reports: an opportunity to communicate research and findings to practitioners

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