Connection to Nature in a Residential Care Home

Having a connection to nature is known to be beneficial for residents but is often lacking in dementia care environments. Research was carried out in numerous homes in the US, the UK and Scandinavia over the past 5 years. Below is a short 25 item checklist to determine the potential for connection to nature a care home can offer. Having such information can help a family caregiver make an informed choice when placing their loved one into a care home. It can also help a professional caregiver to assess their work environment and may therefore contribute to improving practice. Fill in the name and address of the care home and the date.

Name of care home ___________________________ Date ________
Address ______________________________________________________________________

Views and Fresh Air (sit in a chair in the lounge and also in the dining room)
   ____ Does the view from either room contain trees, plants and sky?
   ____ Does the view from either room contain people, traffic and real life activities?
   ____ Are there any tree branches close to the windows (to watch birds & squirrels)?
   ____ Are there windows to the outside on more than one wall of either room?
   ____ Are there any windows open at the moment?
   ____ Can you smell or feel fresh air in either room?

A Nearby Outside Area to Use and Enjoy
   ____ Is the dementia care unit on the same level as the ground outside?
   ____ Is there a door from the dementia care unit to an outside seating area?
   ____ Is there level access (no steps) to an outside seating area?
   ____ Is the door unlocked and easy to open?
   ____ Are residents using the outside area right now (or does it look like they normally do)?
   ____ Is there outdoor furniture such as tables, chairs or benches for residents to use?
   ____ Is the furniture sturdy, clean and well-maintained?
   ____ Are there any umbrellas or awnings for sun protection?
   ____ Is there sporting equipment such as bowls, shuffleboard or horseshoes?
   ____ Is there play equipment such as a swing, slide, climbing frame or ball hoop?
   ____ Are there hanging baskets, planters or trellises being used for plants?
   ____ Are there trees, shrubs and flowering plants visible from the seating area?
   ____ Can residents see the outdoor seating area from where they sit or walk inside the home?

Nature Indoors
   ____ Are there any live or artificial plants or flowers indoors?
   ____ Do the live plants indoors seem healthy and watered?

Animals and Pets
   ____ Does the dementia care unit have any pets (dog, cat, birds, rabbit)?
   ____ Do animals/pets come to visit the residents? (ask the residents or staff)

Horticultural Therapy or Therapeutic Horticulture
   ____ Does an Occupational or Horticultural Therapist do nature-related activities?
   ____ Is there a greenhouse, a potting bench or tool shed the residents use?

____ TOTAL SCORE

For further information or to report a good home, please email garuth@chalfontdesign.com so others may benefit.
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