

Validation therapy: extracts from 20 groups with dementia sufferers

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Validation therapy, an interactive and group technique for people with dementia, is described. Excerpts from the transcripts of 20 validation therapy groups are presented. These demonstrate the surprising ability of the group members (all moderately demented) to share feelings and problems, follow a theme and utilize facilitating skills in the group setting. The contrast between the group members' behaviour outside the group and that in the group is discussed and future research is proposed. The authors conclude that such groups constitute an exciting new therapy for those with dementia.

INTRODUCTION

In 1987 the authors received funding to conduct a pilot study to assess the effectiveness of validation therapy (VT), an interactive technique and group therapy for people with dementia (Bleathman & Morton 1988). VT was developed by Naomi Feil, an American social worker who had grown up witnessing reality orientation (RO) in practice in the old peoples' home at which her parents worked (Feil 1982). Feil considered that RO, by emphasizing the importance of remembering 'our reality', necessarily avoids the more important subjective 'reality' experienced by those with severe memory problems. Her alternative therapy was designed to work around, rather than confront, the expression of factual inaccuracies inherent in dementia.

Validation therapy is a method of communication and a group therapy which focuses on the emotional, rather than the factual, content of what people say. It assumes that the behaviour and speech of the disorientated person has an underlying meaning, and that disorientated elderly people return to the past in an attempt to resolve unfinished conflicts by expressing feelings previously hidden and to relive

memories. In practice this means that the therapist 'validates' what is said, by acknowledging the emotion behind the words or behaviour, rather than correcting factual errors.

The research involved five elderly subjects with dementia and took place over a period of 40 weeks. During the first 10 weeks, the subjects' mood, behaviour and levels of interaction were measured as a baseline and these measures were repeated during the 20 weeks when VT groups were held and the 10 weeks when an alternative group therapy (reminiscence) was applied. The statistical results have recently been published (Morton & Bleathman 1991), but it is the audio-taped recordings of the VT groups which constitute the most interesting data. The contrast between the almost total lack of meaningful interaction observed outside the group, and the members' ability to maintain and discuss the same themes and issues for 45 minutes or more in the group setting shows that this group therapy technique has great potential as an important intervention for those suffering from dementia.

This paper presents a selection of material from what are believed to be the first validation therapy groups held in Britain.

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GROUP MEMBERS

The groups met in a residential home for the elderly in Peckham, South London, which is a typical institution of its type. The residents sit in rows against the walls of the lounge area; the television is always on. All the group members were assessed as being moderately demented, with very poor short-term memory and recall.

Winifred, aged 89

Orientation

Winifred knew her own name, date of birth and the colours of the British flag. She never knew the day, month or year, where she was or any current events. She varied between thinking she was in London and believing she was in Worthing. The care staff assessed her as 'almost always confused'.

Social interaction

Winifred's social interaction was very limited. During 40 hours under observation, outside the group, she spent only 21 minutes in interaction with others. She was assessed by the care staff as talking with others 'only when approached'.

Typical day

Winifred spent many mornings asleep in her room. She usually sat in the lounge dozing during afternoons, except when visited by her daughter who took her out for a weekly drive.

Edith, aged 83

Orientation

Edith was the most variable of the group; she always knew her own name, date of birth and the colours of the British flag, but would vary from being very inaccurate in guessing the month and year to being fairly accurate — although she never knew the day of the week. She was assessed by the care staff as 'almost always confused'.

Social interaction

Outside the group, Edith had occasional aggressive outbursts towards other residents. She would take part in short conversations before the VT period, but, on average, these almost doubled in length in the afternoons following VT. She was generally fairly sociable, if prone to confabulation.

Typical day

Edith spent long periods in her room, often weeping and sometimes destructive to property. At other periods she would engage with others in the lounge, being bright, sociable and often flirtatious.

Reg, aged 79

Orientation

Reg knew the city he was in, his own name and date of birth. He did not know the date or year, his own age or where in London he was.

Social interaction

Reg possessed a good social façade of cockney *bonhomie* but was only able to follow short conversations outside the group — jokes, comments about the weather, etc.

Typical day

Reg was nearly always in the lounge area, and sat next to Flo, rarely leaving his chair.

Betty, aged 86

Orientation

Betty believed that her sister and deceased son were living in the home with her. She usually knew which city she was in but was totally disorientated in time — guessing at Attlee and Eden when asked who the prime minister was.

Social interaction

Betty was socially isolated: in 40 hours under observation outside the groups, she interacted for just over 20 minutes.

Typical day

Betty spent most of her days snoozing in her chair in the lounge. About once a week she would claim to feel unwell and would spend the day in bed.

Flo, aged 90

Orientation

Flo knew her name, that she was in London and the colours of the British flag. Otherwise she was totally disorientated in place and time.

Social interaction

Flo would sit next to Reg in the lounge area, repeating the same questions every few minutes: i.e. asking the time, asking if tea had been yet or what the weather was like.

Otherwise, she would only speak to complain or make disparaging remarks.

Typical day

Flo remained in the lounge, was reluctant to leave or attend groups as she would not 'feel up to it'.

Group activities

The group took place weekly on a Wednesday morning from 11 a.m. to 12 noon. Twenty groups, plus an introductory group, were held using validation therapy techniques. The groups were led by the two researchers, and always followed the same format, in the same room, with the same seating pattern. This provided a sense of group membership and group memory in the absence of individual memories.

The fixed locality and arrangement appear to be important: when approached by the group leaders to accompany them to the group, the members never knew why they had come or where they were taking them, and, in the beginning, were unable to recognize the group leaders. However, when seated in the room it was apparent that the room and seating provided cues which triggered memories of group belonging.

For example, in the group in which members were told that Reg had died a few days previously, they admitted to not remembering him; but when the empty chair that he usually sat in was pointed out, this prompted memories of his participation in the group. He was spoken of spontaneously in subsequent groups by name.

Similarly, in group 20, Betty said on arrival. 'I'm the first here, even Edith isn't here yet'. This comment was despite the fact that when approached in the lounge a few minutes earlier she did not know where, or why, she was being taken and yet she correctly remembered, on entering the room, that Edith was usually the first person to arrive.

The room selected was small and they sat in a circle close enough to hold hands. It is interesting that in Reg's welcoming speech at the beginning of the 11th group he commented on the size of the room:

We're in this nice little compact room and we all know each other and that makes all the difference.

The format of the group is that which Naomi Feil describes (Feil 1982). Each member is welcomed by the group leader who shakes their hand and thanks them for coming by name. One of the group members, who has taken on the role of 'welcomer', is invited to say a few words of welcome and is thanked by the leader for their speech. The group holds hands for the opening song —

which is always the same — led by the 'songleader'. A theme for discussion is introduced by the group leader, unless one arises spontaneously following the opening song, and after approximately 40 minutes the regular closing song is followed by the 'thanker' thanking everyone for coming. Refreshments are then served by the host/ess.

This rigid format, with each member sticking to their particular 'role' ('welcomer', 'songleader', etc.), serves the same purpose as the fixed seating and room arrangements, that is, to create a fixed and familiar environment and routine in which they feel comfortable and to which they become accustomed. It seems to provide cues to remember previous groups as, for example, in group 20. This group was being filmed by a man they had not met before and Edith points out the extra man in her closing speech: 'We have two [gentlemen] here instead of one'.

Betty, who adopted the songleader role, frequently began the opening or closing song without prompting, the songs serving the purpose of not only giving them the pleasure of singing but also of triggering memories which provided a topic for discussion. As is not uncommon in those with memory problems, they had little difficulty remembering the words of songs.

The roles and the seating plan were tested and assigned in the introductory group. By the end of this group the roles of songleader (Betty), welcoming speech-maker (Reg) and hostess (Winifred) were allocated. Using a song book of old songs in large print, the members chose two songs — 'When You're Smiling' to open the group, and 'Side by Side' as the closing song. The therapists took it in turns to lead the group.

THE THEMES AND CONTENTS OF THE GROUPS

The choice of themes for discussion in the groups was guided by Naomi Feil's advice to 'select universal feeling areas . . . topics that bring out feelings of: love, belonging, fear of separation, anger, struggle for meaning, identity' (Feil 1982). The authors found many aspects of the groups surprising: the members' ability to share feelings and problems, their ability to follow a theme for up to an hour, their facilitating skills to open up the discussion to other group members and, not least, their obvious enjoyment of the groups.

The first group following the introductory group developed the theme of meeting together and it was apparent, even at this stage, that they were able to provide support to each other. Edith was initially tearful in the group when talking of her husband but was comforted by Reg who acknowledged and allowed her to talk of her loss. The

members had asked us to tell them how old they were by telling us their dates of birth. We had then asked them how old they felt:

- Edith Twenty-one, oh I wish I was. I'd have my husband with me for one thing.
 Reg That's the main thing.
 Edith Oh it is, Reg. (cries) I'm sorry.
 Reg That's alright dear.
 Edith I'm sorry if I upset you all.
 Reg No, not at all.

There was a discussion about whether to increase the size of the group but Win was against this:

- Win I think myself this is unusual where you seldom get the chance of a closer group feeling similarly and I would leave it as it is.

In this group they frequently expressed their enjoyment at meeting together again:

- Edith I think it's very nice of you to spend your time with us . . . I never had any thought that we could meet you in the week, like we have done and I think it's marvellous that you give up your time . . . I think it's a wonderful idea. I wish there were more people like you.
 Win Absolutely
 Edith Oh, I'm pleased to be here. Especially now I've got into the meetings and I see Reg, although I see him all the week, you can't have much of a conversation, can you?
 Reg No.
 Edith But when we meet once a day, once a week, whatever it is, I think that's lovely, I really do.
 Reg Brings you more together.
 Edith Definitely, yes, you know what each other wants, unhappiness and happiness.

Their pleasure is further illustrated by Edith's comment when asked whether the groups should carry on meeting like this.

- Edith Really, you've given us a fresh start to living.

In his closing speech Reg sums up the group:

- Reg I think we've thoroughly enjoyed each other's company and I think that's the main thing. We all joined into a little song and that makes everything much better as well.

At the end of the group Win asks if there is a name for the group to help her remember it, and the group leaders decide to discuss this at the next group.

Smilers

Following the singing of 'When You're Smiling' to open the second group, Win suggests 'Smilers' as an apt name

for the group and the name of 'The Wednesday Morning Smilers' is unanimously agreed.

By the third group Betty has taken on her role of song-leader and initiates the songs without being asked. Following the singing of the opening song the members talked about the memories it evoked and the leaders developed the theme of whether songs make you happy or sad. When one of the leaders asked Edith what memories she had of a particular song, she replied:

- Edith Oh it's too long ago, dear. I was only little, like this (indicating the height of a child).

The leaders learned that it was difficult for them to answer such open-ended questions and later she reminisced with ease about her past after more singing. They asked if they could come up more often and Edith expressed her pleasure by saying:

- Edith Isn't this nice? I enjoy every minute of it. It's never come to me in my life before, never.

The following conversation at the beginning of the fifth group (which took place in November) demonstrates how the leader's response to a factually incorrect statement acknowledges the emotion behind what was said and also encourages group cohesiveness:

- Edith I've been looking forward to this for a long time and now it's here.
 Leader Now it's here.
 Reg It seems a long time when you say last year, doesn't it; it's only a few weeks, isn't it?
 Leader It's only 1 week, but it feels longer, doesn't it? You miss it when you're away from each other.
 Reg Yes.

UNFINISHED CONFLICTS

Feil (1982) describes VT as a means of resolving unfinished conflicts from the person's past. In the fifth group, such a problem from Reg's past life was focused on. In the first four groups Reg had frequently repeated an account of his father's heavy drinking and how he used to arrive back from the pub drunk and have to be put to bed by Reg's mother. Usually the details were given in the form of a light-hearted anecdote. When Reg again said that the song reminded him of his father the leader encouraged him to expand on the issue.

The group focused on Reg's feelings for his father and his attitude to his drinking. He described how his mother sometimes made him responsible for seeing that his father did not drink when they were out together, but as Reg was only a child he could not stop him going to the pub. He

recalled the effect of his father's drinking on his mother, his premature death from cirrhosis of the liver and his funeral with many colleagues from 'the print' paying their respects. Through this group, Reg was enabled to express and have acknowledged the different emotions he felt for his father and he was able to recall some happy memories of him.

The theme of loss of parents continued throughout the group with Win talking of her father's activities in the Church to the exclusion of activities and involvement in the home which saddened her mother. Edith, for the first time, told us her father was dead and how much she missed him, his loss being greater than that of her mother. Win told us she missed her mother more. Throughout the discussion they all used the past tense and acknowledged that their parents were dead. Despite the painfulness of what they were discussing, they expressed their need for the group:

Edith I hope you'll always be as happy, everybody here, as they are today. I hope you won't have any heartache.

Leader It helps to get together like this, doesn't it? *

Edith I'd like to thank you all for inviting us because we wouldn't know what else to do. It's something that I look forward to and I'm sure they do, every day of my life and I wish I could come more often.

Reg I do.

Despite being orientated, in this group, to the loss of their parents, a week later, when asked whether she liked living in a home, Edith replied:

Edith I've no need to live here because my parents are still alive and live in Offley Road. My father and mother and my two brothers are still alive, thank goodness.

This illustrated the effect of asking questions which contained too many inferences which the members might wish to deny, i.e. in this instance, that they lived in an old people's home. The authors learned from this that to ask the question 'how do you like living in an old people's home?' was too confronting and for them to accept that they lived in a home meant accepting that they had lost their families and their homes and were too old to look after themselves.

Making friends

In the following conversation the members exchange personal opinions on making friends, with Edith making facilitating comments:

Leader Winifred, do you miss your home?

Win Yes, I do very much. I feel in a way lost which isn't all the best.

Edith But you've got friends here, haven't you?

Win I don't think I know anyone here.

Edith Oh surely you do. I've seen you sitting next to people, I've never known their names and I've been here a year ... I sometimes think that she's a little bit lost but I don't think it takes her long to get in line again, does it?

Win No, It's not a quick thing.

Leader Do you ever feel lost, Reg?

Reg No, not actually myself because I've gone from different place to different place being a chauffeur and it makes all the difference in the world ... I'm easy to make friends.

Win I think that I've been the opposite, I've not made friends easily. It isn't that I'm not friendly but I like something in common and it takes you quite a bit to find people who have some point in common that you can enjoy or talk about or so forth.

Reg's closing speech continues the theme of friendship:

Reg Well, I must say it's very nice to come and meet the same friends and you go back out of here and you're still thinking of it in your head enough to say, well I've met some lovely friends and I mean that.

In this group Edith fluctuates between fantasy and a painful reality. She told the group that she had lots of children or had recently adopted babies, but at other points in the discussion expressed her disappointment that she was unable to have children:

Edith Unfortunately I can't have any children and that's a terrible heartache for me. When you love something, it's like if you love a toy and you can't have it, it hurts you ... So one of these days I'm going to get married and I'm going to have half a dozen kids ... That's because I know I can't have any children and to me that's the biggest tragedy of my life. I would rather my husband had left me and left me with the children.

In a later group she described how she longed for a child and how angry she felt when she saw mothers who did not know how to care properly for their babies. She feared that she might have done something wrong and was being punished by not having children.

By the eighth group Reg's welcoming speech and Edith's response illustrate how close the group is feeling:

Reg Well, we're all together now as one family and I think that's the best way to put it.

Edith It would be nice to have a big family like this, wouldn't it? A grown up one.

Reg Yes, it's nice to know each other.

Group support

The support that they provide to each other within the group is apparent in the following conversation in group

nine in which Edith starts by fantasizing about getting married again. The group leader's validating response encourages her to express her emotions, about which Reg expresses empathic understanding:

- Edith I'm going to get married again and I hope you'll all come to the wedding because I know I'm going to be very happy.
- Leader You'd like to get married again, would you, Edith?
- Edith I can't bear to think of living alone.
- Leader Do you feel like you live alone here?
- Edith Oh yes, all alone.
- Reg Get it off your chest a little bit and then you'll feel a lot better.
- Edith Yes, I feel like you're one of me.
- Reg Otherwise it stops it building up.
- Edith Would you get married again?
- Win I think so yes, but I'm not alone.
- Edith You're not. Oh.
- Win No, I'm thinking how I would feel if I were.
- Leader You were putting yourself in Edith's shoes
- Edith It's not very nice to be alone.
- Everyone No.
- Edith Like I am living in the home, I've got plenty of people around me but I am really living alone here.

In some groups the members appear disorientated initially but become more orientated as the group continues. In the tenth group Win talks as if she is still a housewife needing to get the housework done, but later in the group speaks graphically about what it is like to be old:

- Leader What is it about getting old that you don't like?
- Win The tiredness in everything. I mean now I feel as tired as can be, it's quite ridiculous because I love being here with you and yet I feel like that and that is the thing that is most bothersome. But the physical side of one will not behave as you'd like it to do. It will just do what it wants to do in old age and that's that.
- Leader That must be frustrating.
- Win Yes, sometimes it is, very. Sometimes I can't do things simply because my whole body and self want to relax.

Later in the group Win returns to the theme of old age, when she is asked about her attitude to Christmas:

- Win I just take it as it comes and look forward to it beforehand and am quite happy when it's over. I don't know whether it's old age but that is how I look at life, accept it as it comes, if it's difficult, well just lump it for a little while and make the effort and then go on, straight on.
- Leader You're a lot more philosophical about things.
- Win Yes, exactly. If you're not, old age can be rather troublesome. If you look at it as one of the things that comes and you get ready for it you are almost sort of

enjoying the fact that no one expects so much of you. You relax a bit more.

Later Edith again spontaneously expresses her enjoyment of the group:

- Edith When I decided to come up here I had no idea it was going to be like this. Thank you both. It's a pity we can't do it more often, but we must be grateful for small mercies.

Reg died suddenly in the week between the 10th and 11th groups. Initially, in the group following Reg's death, the members were unable to remember him. However, this event naturally provided the group with the theme of dying. They shared their feelings about death and all the members expressed a lack of a fear of dying. Their positive attitudes to death helped the leaders to cope with their own sadness at the loss of Reg. Betty recounted an incident when she was ill and had heard her family whispering that she would be 'dead and buried by Christmas'. She said she no longer worried about dying as she did when she was younger. Edith imagined that when she went to heaven she would sing all the time and Win said, 'I don't fear death at all.'

As the group continued they remembered Reg and mentioned his name and the theme of loss was taken up by Win as she described her emotions when she was sent to boarding school. She 'loathed' being sent away from home as she loved her mother very much. She described how the homesickness never went away and she wept at night as she felt she was 'losing something'.

Depression

One of the members, Edith, presented difficult behaviour outside the group. At times she was physically aggressive to other elderly residents at the home, but mostly she spent long periods in her room refusing to come out, even for meals. The care staff felt she was depressed as she was frequently tearful and on one occasion they found she had smashed the frame containing a photograph of her husband and torn it into pieces.

Prior to the thirteenth group, Edith was reluctant to come to the group saying she had taken something to kill herself. It was unusual for Edith to need to be persuaded to join the group as she was usually very keen when approached and on one occasions the leaders were surprised to find her sitting in the room where the group was held, waiting for them to arrive. With encouragement she came to the group and wept throughout, but was unable to share with others the reason for her unhappiness.

This produced some conflict in the group as Win became increasingly exasperated that Edith could not tell the group what was wrong:

- Win You don't feel as though we can help you at all?
 Edith I'm sorry dear, no.
 Win Well that's strange that you're here with us, because the very fact of being here with us is because we feel we can exchange our feelings and thoughts.
 Edith Yes, I know.
 Win So why can't you do that now because we'd help you, we wouldn't be critical.
 Edith No, I know.

Later in the group Win tried another approach to try and get Edith to share her problem:

- Win Have you any Christianity in you? That is one of the things that would make us all friends and able to share each other's sadness.
 Edith I do count you as my friends, I always have.
 Win But then if you were, you would mention how you're feeling.

Reassurance

This was the first group in which the leaders had experienced conflict between members, and in order for Edith not to feel rejected the leaders asked the members to reassure Edith that, despite her inability to share her sadness with them, she was wanted and needed in the group.

The group ended with laughter. When the leaders during refreshments said that they were watching their weight, Win replied, 'I've watched it, but it's no good!'

In the following group a week later, they again returned to the role of the group and Win recalled some of the conflict in the previous week's meeting:

- Win The world would be a nicer place if this kind of thing were to happen more. It could, it's not very expensive or anything like that.
 Leader Tell us what it is in particular you enjoy about the meetings, Win. Is it just getting together with other people?
 Win And hearing other people's views on things, or their attitude towards things. It's like thinking of people and being a spirit and having their feelings echoed by other people and perhaps sometimes contradicted and suggested that they're wrong. Because we're friendly enough to know that we can actually say that you feel something's wrong and the person won't take offence at it because it's understood that we exchange what we feel about things.

Later in the group they talked about the loss of their husbands and Win described how she felt that her

husband's spirit was still with her although she had lost him. Other members understand and acknowledge this feeling and Flo agrees:

- Flo My loved one is no longer with me, but in my mind I'm never alone.

Other loved ones are mentioned: Flo's mother-in-law is spoken of as a replacement for her mother who left her when she was quite young.

Growing older

Group 15 was a birthday celebration for one of the members with a cake to cut and the singing of 'Happy Birthday', and the theme of birthdays and growing older followed naturally. In response to the leaders' request for their opinions on this subject, they gave the following views:

- Win ... I certainly think that as one gets older, although when you're young you don't think it's going to be like it, but when you get to this age you find it brightens up very much on a birthday, you feel less old than you are and more sort of friendly and sort of with other people and whether or not it's because people are more kind and friendly to you and that has an interior kind of effect on you and you know it, but I must say that I feel birthdays, old birthdays, are precious things and it's lovely to be able to exchange it with other people really, hearing about it.
 Betty I think it's very good. I think the longer we can stop young, the better it is for us, all of us, no matter who it is.
 Flo You've got to have it, whether you like it or not. Take it as it comes and please God that it's good. And thank God that we've been happy together. I think that's very good. I often thought that I would never reach it, ill and operations and one thing and another, but with God's help I've got over it and I thank God for it and now I'm amongst friends and I'm very pleased.
 Edith Well I do think it's very nice if you can meet a friend on your birthday: to talk over old times, if you've got any old times to talk over if you're old enough, and I think it's nice for your family as well.

When Edith spoke about her brother and husband in the present tense as if they were alive, the group leader responded to the emotion of what she was saying by asking:

- Leader Yes, so you're thinking a lot about people who are close to you on your birthday?

Flo continued the theme of loved ones they have lost by talking again about the loss of her mother and how good

her father was to them after their mother had left. The closing speech from Flo, and Win's agreement, summed up the closeness of this group:

Flo Edith, I would like to say a few words. It is your birthday today and this is a very, very nice gathering of friends to make you feel that you're really cared for and thought about in this world, you never know. God bless you and always be with you.

Win Yes, the spirit of us is a big one in the middle.

Memory loss

People with this level of impairment rarely acknowledge or discuss their memory problems so the leaders were pleased when in the sixteenth group, they spontaneously talked about what it was like to be unable to remember. The leader had told the group that Betty was ill and unable to attend:

Flo I can't remember her, you know. Blessed memory! It's all round like me!

Win I'm interested to hear you say that, because I feel [the same]. It's a disgrace, my memory vanishes altogether. Then suddenly something comes back and the whole thing...

Flo Yes, I know, it reminds you again. Yes, I know. It's terrible with me now, I used to be alright but now — no. Terrible.

Edith I think when you get older, you lose a lot.

Leader You lose a lot?

Flo Yes, doesn't sound much to say 'oh you've lost your memory' but it's a terrible loss, it is really and truly a terrible, terrible big loss.

Leader What's it like?

Flo A break, just like a break, like something's been cut away. Oh it's a horrible feeling and when I'm trying to remember it's a rumbling all the time, like something's trying to get in. It's a horrible feeling.

Win I've got a very silly memory. Occasionally it comes to me, very occasionally, but I can't make it by doing anything and I find it very trying indeed and I understand and sympathize with people whose memory goes funny ... very frustrating. I was considered on the bright side and won a wonderful scholarship and then to go to the opposite way when you can't remember ordinary things, it's disgraceful and the other thing is when I come to a group like this I feel ashamed because I feel that I could be making it more difficult for other people if I have things occasionally said again just for me as I have to ask ... I think myself it's about time I gave up the joy of coming with other people and jolly well kept my amusements to myself.

All No.

Edith We don't know everything and we often ask you things and you tell us.

Win I don't remember that.

The effects of losing one's memory had been demonstrated in an earlier group when Win had said how frustrated she felt when she forgot things and she expressed this by beating her breast. And in a later group, Betty spoke of her experience of memory loss and disorientation:

Betty That's the one thing I miss most, when you get up and you don't know what day it is.

Although the members were unable, even by the eighteenth week, to remember why they were being collected for the group meeting, once in the room and their usual seats they remembered that this was a place where they enjoyed each other's company. Win demonstrated this in her welcome speech at the very beginning of the group:

Win It's a nice morning and some people would want to be outdoors and it's very nice of them to come here and have the indoor sunshine which we are likely to have being here together.

Betty followed this by starting off the opening song without prompting. Edith's closing speech shows again the pleasure the members experienced from meeting in this way:

Edith Thank you everybody for coming but it's not my party it's yours, which I'm sure we're all very pleased of. I know I am. I look forward to coming here and when I realize the day isn't the day I could sit down and cry, because I like coming here so much ... It's the highlight of my life.

MARRIAGES AND ADVICE

In the first 10 groups the members talked more about their parents than spouses and the leaders had invited them, in the eleventh group, to tell them more about their marriages. However, such a direct approach brought little response and a more indirect approach was used in the twentieth group with more success. In this group they were asked the question, 'what advice would you give a young person about to get married?' Edith spontaneously facilitated the discussion by asking each group member if they thought that long courtships were a good thing. During this discussion Win was able to talk about her dissatisfaction with her marriage:

Leader How did you meet your husband?

Win Interest in what we lived for, as it were. The deep kind of interests. His was running a Sunday afternoon men's club and service as well, and my father was rather interested in that sort of thing and I had just inherited it and because of his interest in other people I don't think it's

a very good idea because you don't get personal interest and although some people might find life quite happy enough...

Edith Well, when I met Alec I knew that I had a man, only one in the world like him because he loves his mother and she's very nice. She's quite small if you saw her, she's much smaller than I am but he's a big man to have, isn't he? He was a very big baby when he was born but they were very happy and they're still happy together and I wouldn't separate them not for anybody. Ours is a real, you'll think I'm silly, but ours is a real love match, it really is.

Leader It is important in a marriage, isn't it?

Edith Oh definitely, dear.

Leader I remember Win saying last week that it was important for your prospective husband to get on with your family, and your husband got to know your family well didn't he?

Win Yes, and there was, although not a very close thing. For example, they belonged to different denominations in the Christian Church but nevertheless their spirit of doing things for people when they met them and that sort of thing did join up and remain the same with them and I felt was one of the things that mattered most.

Leader But the personal interest in you wasn't there in your marriage?

Win No, it was as a person in the, I don't know what you'd say, the other group of people that you were with, not in the person herself so much. But it lasts quite well and it doesn't get onto other people but it isn't very close. That's what I would say.

Leader And you would have liked it to be closer?

Win Well yes, I personally would have liked to have a real love affair and I always felt a little bit 'chilly' as it were in the affair of doing anything with other people but the reason we got on were the moral wishes of my father doing the Sunday afternoon meeting and my attitude which had grown from being at the Blue Coat School, where you got interest in other folk very close, much more so than in ordinary life, that kept us together. We never had any difficulties whatever.

Florence shared marital problems, describing how her husband had 'killed any love I had for him' because of his affair with another woman. Again they expressed the need for the group, with Win saying she liked coming to the group as she could talk about things she would want to discuss with her family but could not as they lived away. Edith summed it up in her closing speech. (The second gentleman referred to is a colleague filming the group.)

Edith Thank you, ladies and gentlemen — we have two here today instead of one. Thank you all very, very much for coming... I'm glad to see you're all nice and smiling and looking as if you haven't any troubles on your shoulders. And I want to thank you, dear, and you, Ian, for all the things you've tried to do for us. You've been good to us, haven't they, these two young people. I think they're wonderful. It's a pity there aren't a few more... If I live to a hundred, I'll never forget you.

Flo responded by adding:

Flo It gets some of it off your chest.

CONCLUSION

These transcripts demonstrate the startling contrast between the quality and quantity of interaction these people with dementia engaged in outside the groups and that witnessed within the VT group setting. It had not been expected that people as cognitively impaired as those selected would be able to express such depth of feeling and interact with others at such an intense and, the authors believe, therapeutic level.

What remains to be established is how far the improved functioning witnessed in the groups was due to the use of interactive VT techniques as described by Feil (1982), and how far it was the result of the rigid application of the social protocol of the groups, and the manufacture of an environment and group atmosphere designed to maximize the remaining social skills of the members.

A larger study involving a more comprehensive use of VT, a larger sample and the use of a control group is now required to answer this question. Whatever the outcome of such research, the authors are convinced that such groups constitute an exciting new therapy for those with dementia.

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