

# TimeSlips™ Storytelling within an Acute Hospital Setting, the Value of Being Creative

Alison Ward, Researcher  
[Alison.ward@northampton.ac.uk](mailto:Alison.ward@northampton.ac.uk)

Jan Brear, Occupational Therapist  
[jan.brear@nhft.nhs.uk](mailto:jan.brear@nhft.nhs.uk)

## Forest Centre

A purpose built 24 bed unit providing acute mental health assessment and treatment to older adults, including 8 specialist dementia beds.



Using a person-centred approach, treatment is provided for patients in the early stages of dementia to those with more complex needs, in preparation for discharge to their own home with support, or an appropriate care provider. Staff provide meaningful activities to promote the wellbeing of their patients.

A collaboration with the University of Northampton led to a trial of an innovative method of engaging with people with dementia: TimeSlips™.

## Our approach

Weekly sessions are run for patients diagnosed with dementia and those who have a mental health condition, using the **TimeSlips™** storytelling method<sup>1</sup>.

TimeSlips uses a photographic image and invites storytellers to use their imaginations to create a story. Through asking open questions, storytellers are encouraged to contribute to the story using the image as inspiration. While personal memories can be incorporated, the focus is on using the imagination rather than relying on memory.



2-10 people attend each 30 minute session. All story responses are written down to create the final story, which is read aloud several times during the session and the finished story is written out and given to each storyteller and their family.

The format has evolved to bring together people with functional mental health conditions and people with dementia. Our concern was that the more able people may overwhelm the people with dementia, but in reality it has enhanced the group. The process is carefully facilitated to ensure everyone has a voice, and is encouraged to contribute throughout.

## Pedro and the Chickens



*(buk buk) The chickens are being fattened up for the next part of their lives – the last part of their lives...*

*Pedro is quite probably drunk. He's enjoying himself – yes I think so. He's fattening them up for Christmas for eating. The chickens think 'buuukk'. It looks like Pedro is on his own. He's holding a salt cellar and a cosh. It's preparation for the birds who will be food – pre salting them.*

Creative Commons 2.0: To Share, To Remix, Attribution;  
Photographer: Tomás Jorquera Sepúlveda



**The Meeting**

*... She is going to the theatre to see a West End play. She is going to see a play called "The lady in the looking glass" and go out for dinner.*

*She is going with her boyfriend, not her husband. Scandal!! She is going to meet him there because he is married, so he could be one of the crowd. They have met before. ... It was love at first sight, or was it the red lippy! It was a cheap lippy and went all over him. He is in trouble now. How did he explain the red lippy to his wife? Maybe he didn't! They are not getting on.*

*It is a bit of a secret – this relationship. Another time they met at Victoria Station – not Kettering as everyone knows them there. At Victoria Station, they kissed and cuddled. The passers by thought they were in love – but that's a misconception.*

*Now we've got to get back to earth. The lady's husband doesn't mind about all this, as he has a fancy woman, who wears red lippy as well.*

*We said about getting back to earth, but it could have been the moon. She sings "fly me to the moon and let me play among the stars".*

*'it' was nice for everyone to join in' (storyteller)*

*'It is allocated time to explore their thoughts... sometimes just a picture can spark something... and you don't know where it's going to take you.'* (staff)

## Outcomes

Patient benefits include:

- ❖ Taking pride in being part of the storytelling process
- ❖ Sharing stories with their visitors
- ❖ Being surprised at their own creativity
- ❖ Having feelings of ownership
- ❖ No longer being just a patient, but a co-author

Other benefits:

- ❖ It is seen by some as a highlight of the week
- ❖ Stories can be **intelligent, humorous, reflective, creative, imaginative** and include **personal memories**
- ❖ Stories include sight of the person behind the dementia
- ❖ Staff look forward to reading the latest story
- ❖ Breaking down barriers between patients with acute mental health and dementia creating a shared experience enhancing understanding and empathy between fellow human beings.

Reference: <sup>1</sup>Basting, A. D. (2011) TimeSlips Training Manual: Creative Storytelling with People with Dementia. Wisconsin-Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Milwaukee Centre on Age and Community.