

Videoconferencing with family members enriches the lives of nursing home residents

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Nursing home residents who used videoconferencing to keep in touch with family members felt it enriched their lives, according to a study in the June issue of the *Journal of Clinical Nursing*.

Thirty-four residents from ten nursing homes took part in the study. The 18 women and 16 men had an average age of 75.

All of them said the experience enriched their lives, just under two-thirds said it was the second-best option to family visiting and a third said it gave them a true picture of family life.

"A trained research assistant helped the residents speak to their spouse, child or grandchild using SKYPE or MSN" explains co-author Professor Yun-Fang Tsai, Chair of the School of Nursing at Chang Gung University in Taiwan. "At the end of the three-month study period, all the participants took part in in-depth interviews."

The average videoconferencing session lasted just under 12 minutes. Twelve per cent took place daily, 47 per cent weekly, 23 per cent monthly and 18 per cent occasionally.

The residents were very positive about the experience. They said it gave them a chance to be part of family life, see relatives who had moved abroad and allay anxieties if relatives were unable to visit. Comments included:

- "It is a fun and helpful activity. Although it took me a little time to interact with my family I feel fabulous every time after talking with my son. Sometimes he plays a song I like on the violin, which he would never bring here. He also shared some photos with me, the pets in the house and so on."
- "My daughter-in-law owns a pet store. She always shows me what's new in her store, such as a new pet. It's really interesting."
- "If my family could come to visit me in person, that would be the best way since I can see them more clearly...But they are very busy and have no time to visit every day. This may sometimes replace their in-person visits."
- "My son lives in America and has his own business. He only has time to visit me once or twice a year. Via [videoconference](#), I have the chance to see my son, grandson and so on."
- "I feel less anxiety. If my son does not visit some week I would not be anxious, worrying about the status of his family and clamouring to go home. This is better than the telephone for I can see the real thing. I wouldn't think my son is lying to me that everyone in the family is OK. I can see their rosy faces, which are very believable and real."
- "Since my son emigrated to America my grandson seldom comes back to Taiwan due to his school life. Via the videoconference programme I can see how tall he has become."

Some of the residents felt slightly anxious or self-conscious about using the equipment as they were unfamiliar with computers and found it strange to see their family on a screen rather than in person. Comments included:

- "When I first used the setup, it felt very strange to talk with a computer even though my son was on the other side."
- "Sometimes I have no idea what to say, but it is fine since I can see my children. That part is good."
- "I hope I can deal with my teeth. It would help me to say more. Otherwise my dental problems would interfere with my family understanding what I am saying."

"We were very pleased with the positive reactions this initiative received" says Professor Tsai. "In fact, the researchers often arrived to find the residents had been waiting for them for half an hour, keen to ensure they didn't miss their slot!"

"It proved a simple way to enrich the lives of people in [nursing homes](#) and enable them to be part of family life. We would also be keen to see this expanded so that families could also become part of their relative's nursing home life.

"Residents needed some time to get used to the programme, and had to have help to use the equipment, but the benefits were considerable and could easily be replicated in a wide range of residential care settings."

More information: Older nursing home residents' experiences with videoconferencing to communicate with family members. Hsiu-Hsin Tsai and Yun-Fang Tsai. Journal of Clinical Nursing. 19, pp1538-1543. (June 2010). [DOI:10.1111/j.1365-2702.2010.03198.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2702.2010.03198.x)

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