

STUDENT LED WINDOW ART INTERVENTION TO SUPPORT LONG TERM CARE CENTERS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

- Long Term Care (LTC) residents have been disproportionately affected by the current Covid-19 pandemic, with increasing social isolation and loneliness
- Finding ways to reduce social isolation and loneliness is important
- Between the months of March 2020 to November 2020, students, providers and faculty from a midwestern academic institution provided window painting at long term care centers
- Feedback for the project was very positive
- In the future, academic institutions and provider groups could continue to organize similar events to improve the overall wellbeing of patients in LTC and find ways to empirically measure response to the paintings

Background

- Individuals living in LTC centers are at a particularly high risk of the adverse effects of social isolation and loneliness due to the COVID-19 pandemic^(1, 2, 3, 4)
- Loneliness and social isolation is associated with adverse health outcomes and perceived overall health in older adults^(5, 6, 7)
- Involvement in the arts is an important method for maintaining quality of life and reducing social isolation^(8, 9, 10)
- Students and other community members wish to help those in LTCs in safe ways⁽¹¹⁾



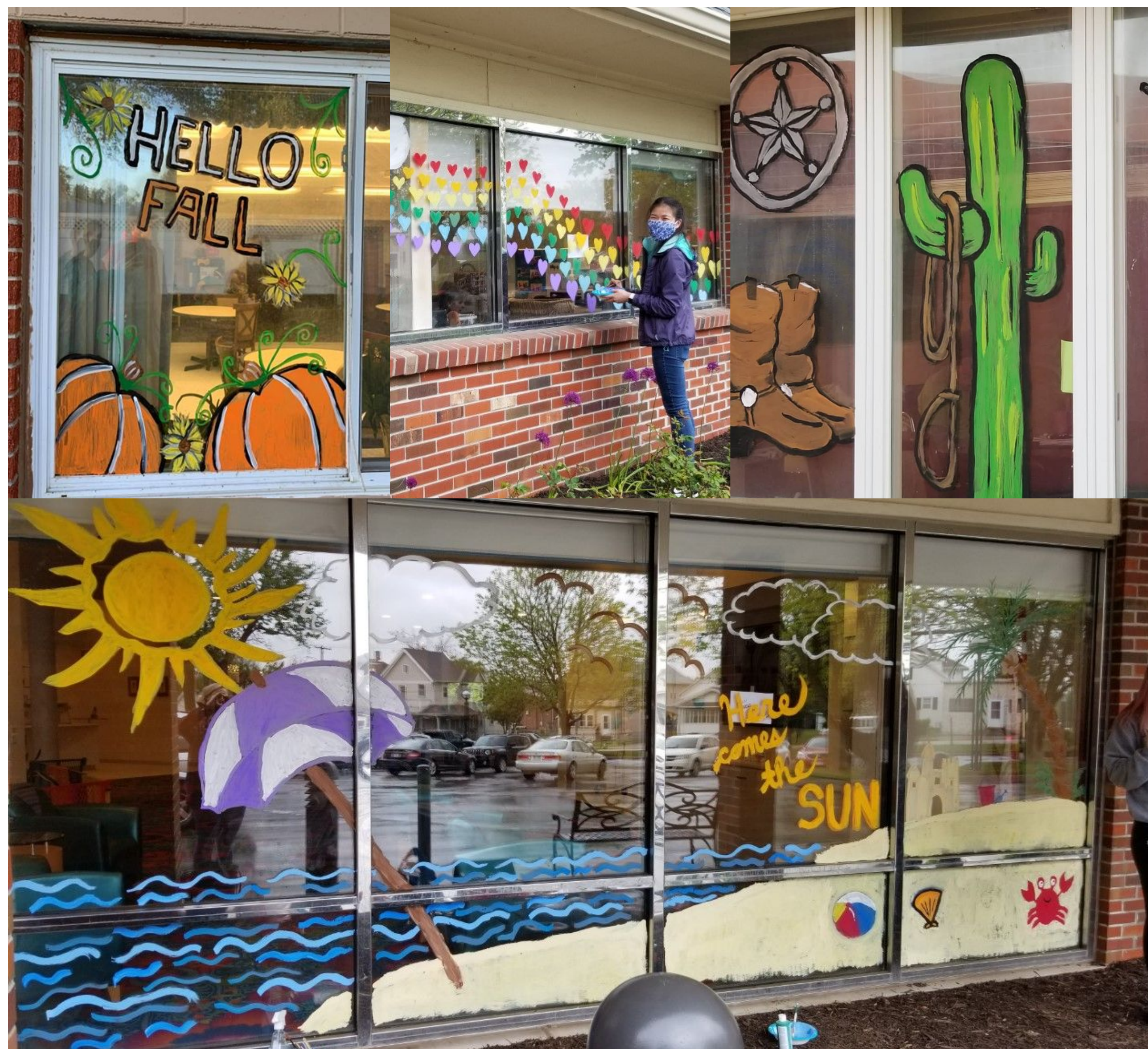
Quality Improvement Methods

Supplies:

- Volunteers for painting
- Tempera and acrylic paint in a variety of colors; brushes in a range of sizes; plastic cups and plates for mixing colors and for cleaning brushes; a water source; window cleaner; paper towels; face masks and hand sanitizer for volunteers

Recruitment and Logistics

- Windows were first cleared with window cleaner then tempura and/or acrylic paints were used to free-hand paint on the outside of the window
- Through connection to an academic LTC medical director, students offered to paint cheerful paintings on the outside windows of a LTC. After piloting the project at one LTC, the service was offered to other LTCs. LTC administrators provided verbal consent for participation. Volunteers worked in partnership with each facility's recreation therapist
- Volunteers were students recruited from an academic medical university. Other non-medical volunteers were recruited by word of mouth
- Volunteers remained outside the LTCs, practicing social distancing and wearing a mask when less than six feet from one another
- Recreation therapists could coordinate painting requests from LTC residents. Painting requests were communicated to the volunteers via text message or sticky note placed on the window. Feedback was obtained by asking residents to report their reactions and responses to their facility's recreation therapist



Results

Descriptive Statistics

- Window paintings were offered to 5 LTCs of which 4 LTCs accepted. One of the 4 LTCs was painted 3 times (spring, summer and fall), and 1 of the 4 LTCs was painted twice (summer and fall). Facilities ranged in size from 63-183 beds and were all on a single level
- Volunteers included physician assistant and medical students, a geriatric fellow, an internal medicine resident, students' family and friends, and a church group
- Paintings requested by LTC residents included flowers, animals (dogs, cats, butterflies, birds), religious images, cars, sports, patriotic images, and others
- For larger LTCs, paintings were focused on front/commons windows and were seasonally themed. On the smallest facility, each resident's window was painted with an individualized painting based on the request of each resident

Feedback

- Afterwards, facilities were contacted for feedback (4 of 4 facilities expressed positive remarks and appreciation), with no negative feedback received. Students and volunteers expressed appreciation for being able to do something helpful that was outdoors and safe

Conclusion and Future Directions

Summary:

Window painting for LTCs is a safe way to help ease the negative effects of social isolation and loneliness for both LTC residents and community volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Wellness activities are important for maintaining health and quality of life, especially in stressful and uncertain times. Window painting can be a positive experience for all parties involved.

Limitations:

- Lack of a standardized measurement of resident and staff feedback at LTC facilities
- Due to social distancing, direct discussion of reactions between residents and volunteers was not possible
- Limited to a small number of LTCs in the midwest

Future Directions:

- Reaching out to more facilities
- Involving other interested groups such as local art students and professional or academic medical associations
- Creating an annual or biannual event for painting
- Utilizing standardized measurement tool for social isolation in evaluation of the intervention such as that done by Cornwell et al.⁽¹²⁾



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