

Orange Juice Tossing

A woman with advanced dementia was residing in a nursing home. She spoke only Russian, and staff spoke only English. When staff would try to take away her food tray after meals, she would throw orange juice at them. She was very accurate. Make her stop.

Who is this person? Checking with the staff and family, it was found that this woman was very independent, and had run a household all of her life.

Making use of abilities that remain. She could hold things, had good vision (note the accuracy of her throwing), and could read (in Russian, once this was checked).

Gather the evidence. Why is this happening? We guessed that it could be because she did not want to have her food tray taken away without giving her permission first. This is an issue of giving choice back to the person with dementia. To take it away without asking (in Russian, so that she could understand) could have been interpreted as an attack on her independence and dignity (like when a waiter or waitress takes away food from you at a restaurant before you are finished).

Use the formula. Going through the formula, we decided that the best approach was to change the environment. We needed to find a way for staff members to ask permission to take away her food so that the resident would understand what they were saying.

Solution. The challenge was how to enable staff who did not speak English to be able to say, “Are you finished?” in Russian. To do this, we created a sign that had a phonetic version of the phrase printed in English – Wee Zah **Kohn** Chee Lee (accent on the syllable KOHN). The sign was placed in the dining room so that staff could see it when they went to get the woman’s food tray. If they said this phrase and she said, “Nyeht,” staff members would back away. If she said, “Dah,” they would take the tray and read another phrase – Spah **See** Bah, which is “thank you” in Russian. This approach enabled staff to give the woman choice, and involved only tweaks in both the physical and social environments. This also kept orange juice out of staff members’ hair.

CLUE: What would make you angry at a waiter in a restaurant?