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Findings of Caretaker's Preference in a Healing Garden

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ABSTRACT

Background: Nature has long been known for its natural healing factor to human beings and it is viewed as being beneficial for health and well-being, both physically and mentally but nothing has been done to cater to a caretaker's need because of too much emphasis on patients, when caretakers are also one of the most important aspects of a patient's well-being. **Objectives:** With this in mind, a study was done at the Ampang Hospital of Malaysia in order to find out caretaker's preference in a healing garden using qualitative research method. **Results:** Respondents prefer to have animals in a natural element the most compare to other items and they also most definitely want water features in a built setting. **Conclusion:** Respondents want more shading, sounds of animals and water features in a healing garden.

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INTRODUCTION

When we talk about hospitals, we tend to think about the patient being treated in there. But we never seem to consider the fact that there are other kinds of people in a hospital setting. Caretakers, being one of all kinds of people found in a hospital surrounding, other than nurses, doctors and other hospital staff, have long been there for patients but somehow their needs are neglected because we are focusing too much on the patients.

By finding out what preference these caretakers want a healing garden, we can use these results to stimulate and trigger the five senses of human beings to an advantage, by means of distracting them from emotions such as being bored, fatigue, stress, emotional pains and so much more. The area outside of the hospital can be used to help caretakers cope with having these feelings of depress. Not only does this help caretakers, they also help patients by sending positive energy from the caretakers to the patients.

Aim And Objective:

For this particular study, it will be more focused on how certain landscape elements in a restorative garden can affect caretakers of cancer patients. It will also focus on which of the landscape elements distract caretakers from their experience taking care of cancer patients. The reason why restorative garden are being used is that the study will be focusing more on the caretakers of cancer patient who are mostly their family member or close friends that are also affected by the condition of the cancer patient emotionally.

Research questions:

- What are the landscape elements that caretakers prefer to see in a restorative garden?
- Which aspect of landscape elements in a restorative garden that affects caretaker emotionally?

Limitations of the Study

The study was able to be conducted in just one hospital and have a limited amount of respondent participated due to privacy reasoning of cancer patients and their caretakers. The study was also only able to be conducted in one hospital because of problems getting cooperation from other hospital and the study was conducted with the help of an inside personnel. Other limitations of the study include reasons of time, resource limitation and an intention to do an in-depth study..

Method:

Case Selection

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The selected hospital with cancer treatment is at Hospital Ampang, Selangor, Malaysia. Visits are done within the duration of 10 days from the middle of April of 2013 to the start of May of 2013. Each visit is done between 10 in the morning to 3 in the afternoon on week days only,

Data Collection:

Questionnaires are being used to collect data for this particular study. This type of method is used because responses can be gathered in a standardized way, so questionnaires are more objectives, certainly more so than interviews. It is relatively quick to collect information using a questionnaire. Information can be collected from a large portion of a group and small groups too. The variables for this particular study are on landscape elements and how respondents feel towards them.

The survey started in the middle of April 2013 and ended at the start of May 2013. 30 respondents are approached and when a sign of consent is given by them to participate in the survey, they are asked to fill in the questionnaire on-site.

The questionnaire given is divided into three parts. The first one is the personal details where respondent are needed to fill their general information detail in the required form such as their gender, age, marital status, ethnic origin and work.

The second section is on respondent's preference and choice of landscape elements in a restorative garden. This section is divided into two parts, Natural Elements and Built Elements, with pictures to assist respondents. In the natural elements section, pictures of trees, shrubs, flowers, lawn, breeze, sunshine and animals are put in while water features, decks, edging, gazebo, retaining wall and patio were added in the Built Element section. Respondents are required to choose one or more elements that they would like to see in landscape setting.

The third section of the questionnaire is a likert scale type questionnaire which focuses more on respondent's opinion on the landscape element itself. Likert Scales have the advantage that they do not expect a simple yes/no answer from the respondent, but rather allow for degrees of opinion, and even no opinion at all. Therefore, quantitative data is obtained, which means that the data can be analyzed with relative ease.

Offering anonymity on self-administered questionnaires should further reduce social pressure, and thus may likewise reduce social desirability bias. A more desirable personality characteristic were reported when people were asked to write their names, addresses and telephone numbers on their questionnaire than when they told not to put identifying information on the questionnaire [4].

Fourteen question were included in this section; "Colourful flowers are attractive", "Flower smells are very calming", "Different flower shapes is more interesting to see", "Different flower sizes is more interesting to see", "Water features with only the water flowing slowly is very calming, Colourful shrubs are attractive", "Different shrubs sizes is more interesting, Gazebo with simple design is more appealing", "Colourful gazebo is more interesting", "Trees with different sizes is more appealing", "Different tree shapes is more appealing, Trees with colourful leaves are more interesting", "Listening to animal sounds (e.g bees, birds) is very calming", and "Lawns with variety of landscape elements are very calming". Respondents are require to choose one answer between "Strongly agree", "Agree", "Neutral", "Disagree" and "Strongly disagree".

The results are being presented using descriptive statistics.

Findings:

Caretakers, which are mostly family members or close friends of cancer patients, all 30 completed and returned the questionnaire.

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Male	6	20.0
Female	24	80.0
Total:	30	100.0

Of the total, 80 percent are female respondents while the rest are male.

Table 2: Age of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent
18 and under	11	36.7
19 – 25	8	26.7
26 – 55	10	33.3
55 and above	1	3.3
Total:	30	100.0

The most age group that participated in this particular study with a total percentage of 36.7 percent is 18 and below, followed by the age of 26 to 55 with a percentage of 33.3 percent. The age group of 19 to 25

followed up with a 26.7 percentage and the age group of 55 and above being the lowest among the group, having only 3.3 percent the whole group.

What are these respondents' preferred elements in a landscape setting? Respondents were asked to choose or more elements that they like to see in a landscape area using a visual-aided questionnaire and table 4 and table 5 illustrates the result.

Table 3: Preferred Natural Elements by Respondents

Natural Element	Responses		Percent of Cases
	Quantity	Per:cent	
Trees	25	15.9	83.3
Shrubs	25	15.9	83.3
Flowers	25	15.9	83.3
Lawn	21	13.4	70.0
Breeze	19	12.1	63.3
Sun	14	8.9	46.7
Animals	28	17.8	93.3
Total:	157	100.0	523.3

Surprisingly, animals are the most preferred natural elements chosen by the respondents, with the highest percentage among the group, making up a total of 17.8 percent. Trees, shrubs and flowers came in second being preferred in a landscape setting, with a total percentage of 14.

Table 4: Preferred Built Elements by Respondents

Built Element	Responses		Percent of Cases
	Quantity	Per:cent	
Water Feature	30	22.6	100.0
Deck	28	21.1	93.3
Edging	10	7.5	33.3
Gazebo	29	21.8	96.7
Retaining Wall	15	11.3	50.0
Patio	21	15.8	70.0
Total:	133	100	443.3

While for the built elements, all 30 of the respondents seem to prefer having water features in a landscape setting making up a percentage of 22.6, followed by the gazebo with a 21.1 percent. Deck is third most preferred built element by respondents with 28 percent, followed by the patio with a percentage of 21. The retaining wall and edging, however, are the least preferred built elements chosen by respondents, with a 15 and 10 percentage for each element.

Table 5: Respondent's Opinion on their feelings towards certain aspects of a landscape setting

Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Agree
Colourful flowers are attractive	10 (33.3%)	6 (20%)	7 (23.3%)	4 (13.3%)	3 (10%)
Flower smells are very calming	9 (30%)	2 (6.66%)	9 (30%)	5 (16.6%)	5 (16.6%)
Different flower shapes is more interesting to see	10 (33.3%)	9 (30%)	5 (16.6%)	4 (13.3%)	3 (10%)
Different flower sizes is more interesting to see	5 (16.6%)	1 (3.3%)	7 (23.3%)	1 (3.3%)	16 (53.3%)
Water features with only the water flowing slowly is very calming	15 (50%)	7 (23.3%)	4 (13.3%)	3 (10%)	1 (3.3%)
Colourful shrubs are attractive	9 (30%)	10 (33.3%)	8 (26.6%)	2 (6.66%)	1 (3.3%)
Different shrubs sizes is more interesting	10 (33.3%)	5 (16.6%)	9 (30%)	1 (3.3%)	5 (16.6%)
Gazebo with simple design is more appealing	10 (33.3%)	9 (30%)	2 (6.66%)	5 (16.6%)	4 (13.3%)
Colourful gazebo is more interesting	15 (50%)	2 (6.66%)	1 (3.3%)	5 (16.6%)	2 (6.66%)
Trees with different sizes is more appealing	7 (23.3%)	7 (23.3%)	5 (16.6%)	7 (23.3%)	4 (13.3%)
Different tree shapes is more appealing	4 (13.3%)	5 (16.6%)	7 (23.3%)	7 (23.3%)	7 (23.3%)
Trees with colourful leaves are more interesting	7 (23.3%)	9 (30%)	5 (16.6%)	8 (26.6%)	1 (3.3%)
Listening to animal sounds (e.g bees, birds) is very calming	9 (30%)	5 (16.6%)	9 (30%)	6 (20%)	1 (3.3%)
Lawns with variety of landscape elements are very calming	9 (30%)	4 (13.3%)	5 (16.6%)	9 (30%)	3 (10%)

So what do respondents actually feel on certain aspects in a landscape setting? Table 5 shows the result from the likert scale questionnaire.

33.3 percent of the whole amount of respondent seems to strongly agree that colourful flowers are attractive to them. About 30 percent of the respondents think that smelling flowers are very calming to them but another 30 percent seem to think it is nothing to them. Different flower shapes is interesting to see to 10 percent of the respondents but 16 percent of them think that the flower sizes are not very appealing to their eyes. Half of the respondents strongly agree that water features with the water flowing slowly is very calming. 10 percent of the respondents do agree that colourful shrubs are attractive, and 10 percent of them strongly agree that different shrub sizes are interesting too.

Another 10 percent seem to strongly agree that gazebo with simple design is more appealing.

Half of the respondents also strongly agree that colourful gazebo is more interesting to look at. About 7% each of respondent chose "strongly agree", "agree" and "neutral" when they are asked if different tree sizes are appealing to them. Same goes to the tree shapes, but the answers were "neutral", "disagree" and "strongly disagree". 9 percent of respondent seem to agree that trees with colourful leaves are more interesting. 9 percent chose "strongly agree" and "neutral" when asked if listening to animal sounds are calming to them. Another 9 percent chose "strongly agree" and "disagree" when asked if lawns with variety of landscape elements are very calming to them.

Discussion:

Out of the 30 respondents, 17 are working while the other are not. It can be assumed that it does not matter whether you have work outside or not, people still take the time to take care of the cancer patients. There is a possibility for the non-working respondents to actually quit their jobs just to take care of them. For those who are working, they might have to be both at work and at the hospital if there is no substitute to replace them or anyone that is trustful enough to do the caretaking, which creates more stress to the caretaker compare to those who don't work.

Natural Elements:

Surprisingly, animals are also a part of a natural element in a landscape setting and respondent seem to want to have animals in them. This is true to the nature as distraction theory where Ulrich [1] notes that positive distractions such as those found in nature, may block or reduce worrisome thoughts, and foster beneficial changes in physiological systems. Respondents seem to like to look at the birds flying and chirping outside and butterflies fluttering with its colourful wings as it appeals to their visual and hearing sense.

From the analysis, it seems that respondents seem to want shadings from the trees and less sun, maybe due to the fact that Malaysian weather is a tropical one and shadings are preferred compare to other countries.

Built Elements:

Seeing how the respondents are in a tropic country, it is not a surprise why all of them preferred to have a water feature in a landscape setting. This is due to the fact of having hot and humid weather all year round but it provides some sort of a distraction from stress and also creates a fascination just from viewing the water flowing [2].

The presence of water features as restoration can be physiological or physical (Kaplan 1995) and the water features may provide opportunities for effortless attention in the form of 'soft fascination' [3].

Water features also creates a sort of a cooling effect to respondent's eyes. They do not feel it with their skin, but it seemed cooler when there are water features around due to their brain thinking the surrounding is much cooler than it normally is.

Respondent's Feelings towards Aspects of a Landscape Settings:

So what are the landscape elements that caretakers of Hospital Ampang, Malaysia prefer to see in a restorative garden? From the results it is concluded that respondents seem to want animals and water features the most due to their distraction factor that takes away their fear, stress and other negative feelings just by looking at these elements and turn those emotions into a positive energy

And which aspect of landscape elements in a restorative garden that affects caretakers emotionally? Respondents seem to agree that colourful elements such as flowers, shrubs and gazebos are interesting and appealing to their eyes. Different flower shapes and shrubs size seem to help too. They love the smell of flower as they calm them down and they seem to love to hear animal sounds such as bees buzzing and birds chirping. They also love a simple designed gazebo to be in a landscape setting and a lawn with a variety of landscape elements.

And of course, they mostly preferred to have water feature as the main focus of a garden in a hospital for both its distracting and calming factor.

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