

I should like to conclude with an extract from D.H. Lawrence's poem *Shadows*:

And if, in the changing phases of man's life  
I fall in sickness and in misery  
My wrists seem broken and my heart seems dead  
And strength is gone, and my life  
Is only the leavings of a life:  
and still, among it all, snatches of lovely oblivion, and snatches of renewal  
odd, wintry flowers upon the withered stem, yet new strange flowers  
such as my life has not brought forth before, new blossoms of me  
then I must know that still  
I am in the hands of the unknown God,  
He is breaking me down to his own oblivion  
To send me forth on a new morning, a new man.

(Lawrence, 1986)

**Reference**

Lawrence, D.H. (1986). *Selected Poems of D.H. Lawrence*. London: Penguin.

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## **Activating potential for communication through all the senses**

The name Sonas aPc™; consists of the Irish word 'sonas' (pronounced sunnus), meaning wellbeing, joy and contentment, and the abbreviation 'aPc' standing for 'activating potential to communicate'. The concept was pioneered by Sister Mary Threadgold, a speech and language therapist and member of the Sisters of Charity, an order of nuns founded by Mary Aikenhead in the 19th century.

The origins of the order were partly a response to the poor conditions experienced by the majority of people living in Ireland at the time and the nuns took an additional vow of 'service to the poor'. The Sisters of Charity were also to become one of the creators of the hospice movement.

There are many different types of poverty and Sister Mary Threadgold became aware that many people with dementia living in long-term care were receiving physical care but that much less attention was being given to their emotional and psychological needs. Her work as a speech and language therapist working with children with intellectual disabilities had suggested to her that music was an effective way of reaching people with

disabilities and she decided to see whether the model could be applied to people with dementia.

### **What does Sonas involve?**

In consultation with other people, Sister Mary began developing a programme of multi-sensory stimulation with a variety of activities to stimulate all five senses. It aims to focus on participants' abilities, rather than their disabilities. The resulting group and individual sessions are of particular benefit to older people with various forms of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's and Stroke. A basic Sonas session consists of:

- opening and closing signature tunes and songs;
- gentle movement and exercises to music; singalongs;
- stimulation of the senses of taste and smell;
- relaxing music and massage;
- lively music and dancing;
- memory focused exercises;
- a section for personal contributions by participants.

Sessions usually take place once a week. The emphasis is upon using structure and repetition to build a secure, comforting environment and trigger participants' memories. The packaged format frees staff to focus on participants and offer additional support where necessary.

### **Training in Sonas**

The Sonas approach is multidisciplinary and is not restricted to a single profession. Basic training is achieved through attendance at a two-day workshop. There is a six week gap between the two days to give staff a chance to implement the programme in their own workplace and return for a consolidation of what they have learned. Some of those attending the workshops are care assistants who are less likely to have formal professional qualifications. However, many take courses that are certified by FETAC, an Irish national awards council and Sonas training is now being considered for FETAC accreditation. Arguably, this is a method based on empowering care staff to develop skills in dementia care, rather than employing an external activities co-ordinator or trainer which can sometimes cause resentment among care staff who feel excluded.

Originally, Sonas sessions were designed to be carried out with small groups in a residential or day care setting but they are now being adapted for use in the family home. In the same way, while the original focus was

upon improving the quality of life for people attending day care or those living in long term care, a recent innovation has been to provide a programme of training in communication and stress management for family carers.

The Sonas sessions have also been adapted for use with older people with intellectual disabilities entitled Anam (an Irish word meaning soul, being or essence). Other current developments include the creation of an advanced Sonas course, a refresher course, a support programme and a coaching-based support service.

### **Benefits for people with dementia**

Experience with Sonas suggests that the sessions help to facilitate communication, increase awareness of surroundings, encourage interaction, initiative and active involvement, trigger memories and provide relaxation and enjoyment for participants and staff.

Sonas aPc™ has undertaken its own research into the effects of Sonas. These suggest that it does result in improved cognitive abilities, reduced behavioural problems, improved abilities to undertake activities of daily living (ADLs) and improved communication.

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