



Are Your Residents Being Led by the Nose?

By Susan Saldibar

How are you using scents and aromatherapy in your senior living community? As someone who recalls visiting nursing homes and being inundated with the smell of cleaning fluid, I have to wonder why any community wouldn't by now have replaced their "eau de somebody-had-an-accident-in-the-hallway" with pleasing, natural scents.

LifeShare Technologies (a Senior Housing Forum partner), through a new partnership with Spectrio, has taken steps to help senior living communities freshen up and improve the air around their residents, according to Miles McCollum, Director of Sales. LifeShare now provides "scent marketing" to their clients. They offer all kinds of scents to evoke different moods, occasions, etc. such as chocolate chip cookies, vanilla, sage, and dozens of others to trigger the senses.

Scent marketing will make a big difference in tours and other on-site events, Miles tells me. And it's certainly easier than investing in cans of air freshener. Miles spoke with a client a few days ago who told him, "It's funny because when we are expecting a tour, we run around the common areas spraying Febreze® everywhere. It makes perfect scents (no pun intended) to implement a system that takes care of the scent for us, and disperses the aroma more naturally throughout the community, matched to specific triggers." No wonder the tagline is "What kind of first impression do you want to make?"

The scents come delivered in advance and prepackaged in different sizes for different areas, Miles tells me. They're also hypoallergenic, so residents and families don't have to worry about an allergic reaction.

Does it just smell good, or is it doing some good?

So, I've heard of the power of scent and aromatherapy and always wondered how effective it really is. I decided to do a little research on my own to see what there was in the way of hard evidence of the impact of scent on our bodies and minds. The research is out there, although not a lot of it. But I did find an article in the [San Diego Tribune](#) which cites studies referenced by the Mayo Clinic that support the idea that certain conditions like anxiety and depression can benefit from aromatherapy. They even cite studies that found that lavender oil aromatherapy could stem the pain from needle pricks for aging adults testing blood sugar or dialysis patients. Pretty interesting stuff.

The rationale, according to the Mayo Clinic, behind the findings revolve around the potential of certain scents to stimulate nasal receptors that transfer information through to the nervous and limbic systems. And those are the parts of the brain that control emotions.

Here are a few potentially powerful ways that scent can have an impact on residents in senior living:

- **Appetite stimulant:** Some of the scents that can stimulate the appetite include peppermint, citrus, and ginger oils, which also reduce nausea and stimulate taste buds.
- **Memory stimulant:** A University of Toronto (UOT) [study](#) found a link between olfactory sensation and memory. Scents like cedarwood have the potential to enhance memory.
- **Mood improvement:** The same UOT study found that lavender may have some benefit in lifting spirits and reducing the sense of sadness and/or irritability.
- **Pain neutralizer:** Scents including lavender, nutmeg, and eucalyptus administered through oil diffusers have the potential to help neutralize pain.

I can't help but think, however, that the best testaments to the power of scent are our own noses. You could probably identify a half dozen aromas that are almost guaranteed to pull you out of a funk and lift your spirits. I know I can. And there are certain scents, like jasmine, vanilla, and lemon that create a sense of freshness and make you feel a little more energetic and positive.

If you are using aromatherapy and scent dispersion throughout your communities, it would be great to hear how it works for you. I would think that staff members and visiting families would also benefit. How could various scents turn a tour into a sensory experience? Let us know.