

Fake bus stop keeps Alzheimer's patients from wandering off

German nursing homes are using a novel strategy to stop Alzheimer's patients from wandering off: phantom bus stops.

By Harry de Quetteville in Berlin 8:31PM BST 03 Jun 2008

The idea was first tried at Benrath Senior Centre in Düsseldorf, which pitched an exact replica of a standard stop outside, with one small difference: buses do not use it.

The centre had been forced to rely on police to retrieve patients who wanted to return to their often non-existent homes and families.

Then Benrath teamed up with a local care association called the "Old Lions". They went to the Rheinbahn transport network which supplied the bus stop.

"It sounds funny but it helps," said Franz-Josef Goebel, the chairman of the "Old Lions" association.

"Our members are 84 years old on average. Their short-term memory hardly works, but the long-term memory is still active.

"They know the green and yellow bus sign and remember that waiting there means they will go home."

The result is that errant patients now wait for their trip home at the bus stop, before quickly forgetting why they were there in the first place.

"We will approach them and say that the bus is coming later and invite them in for a coffee," said Richard Neureither, Benrath's director. "Five minutes later they have completely forgotten they wanted to leave."

The idea has proved so successful that it has now been adopted by several other homes across Germany.

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