

# Volunteers in palliative care in nursing homes – providing quality of life for residents

**REHPA**  
The Danish Knowledge Centre  
for Rehabilitation and  
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## THE AIM

To describe the volunteers activities in nursing homes and how these activities contribute to the quality of life for nursing home residents with palliative needs and their families.

## BACKGROUND

Volunteering has gained an ever-increasing roll in Danish society in general. In health care we are seeing that the municipalities are increasingly working together with volunteers who perform different tasks. In nursing homes volunteers work among serious ill or dying people with palliative needs, and the volunteers seem to offer services for the residents and their families that extend beyond or supplement palliative care provided by professionals.

## METHODS

This study is a part of a PhD thesis planned as three sub-studies: sub-study #1 takes place in peoples own home, sub-study #2 takes place in a nursing home and sub-study #3 takes place in a hospice. The results in this study is related to sub-study #2.

A qualitative design, with participant observations and interviews was used. Three nursing homes in three different Danish municipalities were included:

**Participant observations in three nursing homes:**  
120 hours

**Individual interviews: 14**  
**Informants:**  
8 volunteers  
3 residents and 1 relative  
2 professionals

**Group interviews: 4**  
**Informants:**  
2 Volunteers  
8 professionals

## RESULTS

The volunteers established and provided social fellowships related to for example music, culture, food, nature experiences and psysical movement. The activities seemed to contribute to the quality of life for residents. The activities offered something different from what the professional palliative care could offer, but was limited to those who could come to the common room in the nursing home. The voluntary commitment depended on management and cooperation and recognition from professionals and other volunteers was essential.

## CONCLUSIONS

The findings showed that volunteer activities are characterized by great diversity and contribute to quality of life for the resident and supplement the palliative care in nursing homes. The activities benefit the resident most when the resident is still mobile. Volunteering demands management, cooperation an recognition. Provisions for the families were unclear.

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