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Title Hospitalization rates in nursing home residents with dementia. A pilot study of the impact of a special care unit.

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Abstract Although Special Care Units (SCUs) have recently gained attention as appropriate places for caring for institutionalized patients with dementia, few studies have evaluated their effectiveness. This pilot study focused primarily on one aspect of patient care, the possible prevention of acute hospitalization. Because transfer from nursing home to the acute hospital can be a traumatic experience for patients with dementia, important services that SCUs might provide include those preventive strategies aimed at reducing the need for transfer to the acute hospital. Medical record abstraction revealed that over one year, the rate of acute hospitalization was 21% among 47 patients with dementia in SCUs, compared with 14% among 36 patients with dementia and 14% among 22 patients with no listed diagnosis of dementia residing in non-SCU settings within the same facility. Thus, no statistically significant difference in hospitalization rates was found, although the trend was for increased hospitalization for SCU patients. There was a trend toward deterioration in functional status among SCU patients following first hospitalization (P less than .10). Since the majority of these patients were hospitalized for hip fractures, this finding was not unexpected. There was a trend toward cognitive decline after hospitalization among patients with dementia who were not residing in an SCU (P less than .10). In order to investigate whether acute hospitalizations among SCU patients were preventable, an expert panel was convened to review each episode of illness leading to acute hospitalization. Of the 15 hospitalizations, none were judged "preventable," four were believed to be "possibly preventable," and 11 were considered to have been "not preventable."