

# **Relocating to Specialist Dementia Care Units in Ireland: Experiences of Residents and Caregivers**

**Andrea Bobersky, Trinity College Dublin**

## **Abstract**

The first part of the paper provides a literature review on topics relating to the issue of relocating people with dementia and their caregivers to a specialised dementia care environment. The second part of the paper highlights some philosophical underpinnings of the study. Clinical and epidemiological aspects of dementia are described. Dementia results in intensifying care needs. Numbers of people diagnosed with dementia are predicted to increase significantly within the next decades. Thus, a substantial proportion of Irish people with dementia could benefit from relocating to specialised long-term care settings. Key features of specialist dementia care units (SCUs) are outlined. These features include a purpose-built physical setting and a person-centred approach to care. While it is acknowledged that environmental change may represent a major life event for people with dementia, empirical findings are contradictory. Also, evaluation studies show positive to stable effects of specialised care environments on residents and caregivers. At present, there is a lack of knowledge on i) how Irish long-term care residents and their informal and formal caregivers experience the transition to a SCU, ii) short- and long-term transfer effects, and iii) ways of communicating and managing the transfer. The study explores these issues in-depth. The methodology is based on a hermeneutic phenomenological framework sensu Heidegger. Key principles of hermeneutic research are highlighted and discussed. This approach is considered most appropriate because it i) takes the individual perspectives of residents and caregivers as the starting point for research and practice implementations, ii) promotes a person-centred culture of care and research and iii) helps raise awareness in decision-makers of the views and experiences of people with dementia and their caregivers.