

Key Research: Ulrich (1984) - View through a window influence recovery from surgery.

Method / Design

A field study where patients are matched into two groups of a view of either 'natural scene' or 'brick wall'. Matched on sex, age, smoking status, weight, year of surgery and floor level.

A 'blind' design used where the recovery data was extracted by a nurse who was unaware of the different view of patient's records.

Procedure

Data collected between 1 May and 20 October 1972 – 1981.

Records of patients assigned to rooms on second and third floors where windows either looked out on a small stand of deciduous trees or a brown brick wall.

The same nurses were assigned to all rooms on each floor.

All rooms were identical other than the view in terms of arrangement and physical characteristics. The only thing that differed was the view seen through the window, visible whilst laying on the bed.

Five types of information taken from each record: length of hospitalisation (days), number and strength of analgesics required each day, number and strength of anxiety medication per day, minor complications and all nurses notes relating to patient's condition.

Participants

Records of recovery taken from patients who had undergone gall bladder surgery at a Pennsylvania hospital.

Patients between 20 – 69 years and no history of psychological disturbances.

Final database consisted of records of 46 patients grouped into 23 pairs (15 female and 8 male).

Results

Patients with the window views of the trees spent less time in the hospital than those with views of the brick wall (7.96 vs 8.7 days).

Nurses comments were categorised into positive (e.g in good spirits)or negative (e.g. upset). More negative comments made on patients with brick wall (3.96 compared to 1.13 with the tree view).

On days two to five, tree view patients took fewer pain doses than those in the wall view group but there was no significant difference in anxiety medication.

Conclusions

Patients with the tree view had shorter post-operative stays, fewer negative comments and took fewer strong pain doses of medication. The natural scene through the window thus had some therapeutic influence. It must be noted that the 'built' view in this study was monotonous and thus conclusion cannot extend to all urban views that may present a lively city view.

Key Issues relevant to study

Methodological issues

Generalisability

Usefulness

Ethics

Individual and Situational debate

