

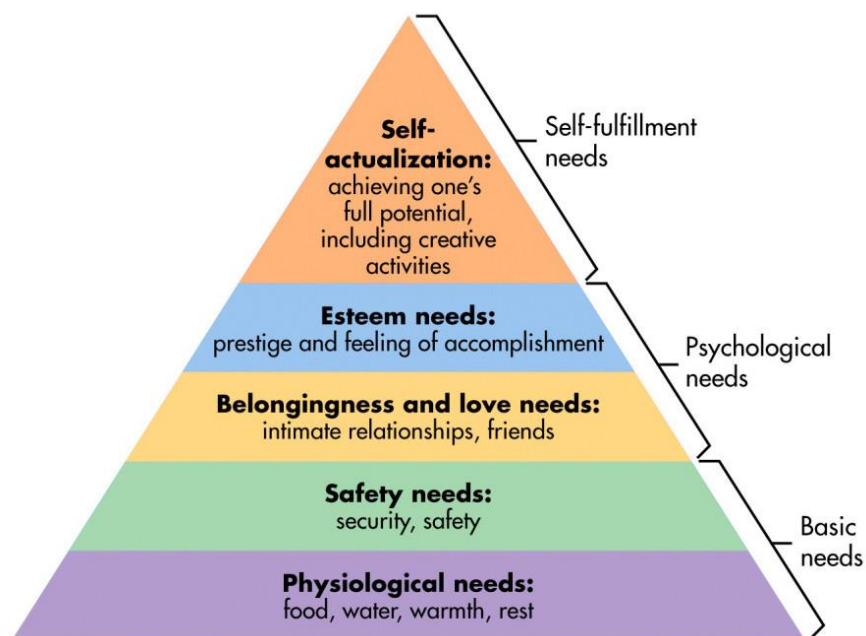
The Small House Model for Memory Care at The Opal at North Naples

Providing the Gold Standard in Residential Memory Care

There is a growing understanding of what makes a successful environment for individuals living with dementia, memory challenges and cognitive impairment. The elements that can make a difference in the lives of those with dementia can be encapsulated in two words – connectedness and a sense of home. The **small house or “cottage” model** has been found to be the most successful environment in providing that sense of home, connectedness, and ultimately, happiness. The Opal at North Naples seeks to provide this environment as well as innovative and pioneering care that is the basis of the small house model within their memory care communities. The Opal believes that this model is the gold standard in memory care.

How We Create the Environment that Leads to Contentment and Happiness in Memory Care

The developmental psychologist Abraham Maslow introduced his theory of psychological health based on fundamental human needs. His theory is known as the *Hierarchy of Needs*. Maslow’s hierarchy says that to be fulfilled—happy—we need to have not only our physiological and safety needs met but also be able to feel like we belong, are accepted and can contribute.



At The Opal at North Naples, we have long subscribed to the belief that the keys to healthy aging include staying physically active and socially connected. For some of us, doing one or both can become more challenging or more difficult over time. This is particularly true of individuals who are living with cognitive impairment and memory loss. Our job as caregivers and partners in caring is to facilitate new ways of helping residents to be and feel connected to the community – their home – while at the same time fostering a sense of independence.

Environmental features are key in both keeping people physically active and connected with others. A 2011 study by Dr. Margaret Calkins, Ph.D., an internationally recognized leader in the field of environments for the elderly, especially those with Alzheimer's or dementia, found that people who lived in small group or cottage settings had less disruptive behaviors and greater socialization. They (and their families and the staff who cared for them) were also more satisfied—happy.

Another study done in 2011 in the Netherlands by Hilde Verbeek titled Redesigning Dementia Care concurred with these findings. Her research indicated that residents in small-scale living communities were significantly more socially engaged and displayed fewer physically non-aggressive behaviors, such as wandering, than residents in larger, traditional settings. They experienced greater wellbeing and less stress—they were happier. The study also found that residents in this “person-environment model” developed an individually meaningful experience of choice, mastery and relationship. They developed a feeling of “at-homeness” or happiness!

Understanding the Small House Model

Caroline Cantley in her 2002 book Put Yourself in My Place stated that there is broad agreement that the most desirable care communities for those with dementia be small in scale, which she defined as 6-14 residents. Getting much larger, she and her colleagues said, is a distinct move away from a “family feel” towards something more institutional. Different research provides other specific numbers, Dr. Calkins suggests between 9 and 24 residents, but they all are within this general range. Larger communities may mitigate their size with their layout, such as linking several smaller houses together to achieve economies of scale.

The Opal at North Naples has embraced this state of the art model with its purchase of Juniper Village at Naples. Ours is a campus with six small cottages, each home to 14 residents in a combination of private and semi-private rooms, spread across secured lovely grounds connected by walking paths and gardens. Outdoor space that allows residents to embrace natural surroundings, participate in outdoor programs, and have independent access to the beautiful weather of Florida contributes to self-esteem and contentment.

Residents have a short walk to the living room, kitchen and dining/activities areas...all within their own cottage. The environment is homelike; there are no nurses' stations and no medication carts that block the hallways. Staff are trained to engage residents in activities of daily living, as well as social and recreational activities. Our entire care team is trained to help our residents make friends and develop a sense of purpose. Quality of life is at the heart of who we are and what we do.

Design Aspects that Matter

Small scale is of course critical, as are several other design elements including:

- High visibility of features that are most important to residents from the location where they spend the most time such as being able to see the toilet from the bed, the kitchen from the living room, the activity space from the dining room. Sight lines to our common areas foster a sense of calm and eliminate the concern of where one is to go.
- Unobtrusive security measures like disguised doors to inhibit exit-seeking behavior, and decorative fencing to provide a secure environment that is aesthetically pleasing.

- Separate bedroom suites can be chosen furnished or furnished with the resident's own belongings.
- Adequate and time appropriate levels of illumination such as brighter lighting during awake hours and dimmer lighter in the evening. Our team understands "sundowning" and its effects on those with dementia.
- Accessible outdoor space to offer opportunities for residents to enjoy nature while satisfying needs to walk and wander safely.
- Sense of movement through different types of spaces, for instance personal bedroom space to family living and dining space, to community activity spaces in our Town Hall concept.

In addition to these items, a 2010 study, Long-term Care for people with Dementia: Environmental Design Guidelines, by Richard Fleming and Nitin Purandare, maintained, "it is desirable that the facility be small, have a homelike appearance and provide opportunities for engagement in the ordinary activities of daily living..."

At The Opal at North Naples that means:

- Consistent staff assignments with the same staff assigned to the same house at the same time as often as absolutely possible, in order to foster a sense of familiarity, an ability to truly know each individual and cater to their particular wants and needs.
- A personalized, custom experience for each resident, through use of My Life Story, Music Assessments, and other tools that help us know each resident as an individual.
- Individualized daily Joyful Moments activities that include assisting with ordinary activities of life, Music & Memories program, art and pet therapy, intergenerational experiences, and special events.
- Family and friends come to visit – just like at home! This can be spontaneous, drop in visits or community planned events that foster a sense of tradition and belonging.

Ultimately, it is all about safety, caring relationships, joyful programs, and quality of life.

The small-house model of care becomes a true community for a group of seniors and our staff. It focuses on respect, individuality, and nurturing the spirit of life. Its heart is found in the relationships that thrive in one's surroundings. The Opal's goal via the small house model is to serve as a place where individuals with memory loss can receive assistance, encouragement, and support with activities of daily living and care, without the assistance and care becoming the focus of their life. Ultimately, it is our goal to provide the key elements to successful memory care – connectedness, home, and happiness.