

Removing architectural barriers in the Homes of elderly persons

Eliminiranje arhitektonskih barijera u Domu starijih osoba

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Introduction: For centuries, the elderly have encountered architectural barriers, which today are the cause of great polytraumatism. Prevention has failed in some areas (1), and even modern architects, creating furniture, contribute to the incidence of polytrauma in the homes of the elderly.

Aim: In the Home for Elderly Priests of St. Josip in Zagreb, together with the architects, we planned to reduce the barriers to a minimum, taking into account recreation and free time in the home environment.

Methods and results: We monitored and photographically documented the situation in the home. The bed was ergonomic, but we were not allowed to eliminate the carpet due to the opposition of the pensioners! In the shower cabin and toilet, we managed to eliminate all barriers, such as on the desk and chair, and implement adequate local lighting, as well as in the corridor and elevator. The environment within the garden of the home is also optimised ergonomically. In the wider area (exit to the street, sidewalks, curbs, entrance to the church), there is also ran into a series of barriers!

Conclusions: Architectural barriers are prevalent in modern cultures as a result of material savings in construction (stair height, railings, flooring), but also architectural whims (examples of chairs by Alvar Aalto, Le Corbusier, and others) (2). Most elderly homes still lack adequate lighting, and rapid transitions from light to dark and vice versa enhance the elderly's risk of falling. In terms of architectural obstacles, the local government's concern for the preservation and repair of public areas and lighting is insufficient. Because of the elderly's falls, the carpet will be a "silent killer" for many years to come.

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