Care staff’s perception of older people’s care environments

Older persons living in residential care facilities are a highly frail group, often suffering from functional and cognitive impairment. The interaction among the well-being of the residents, the care provided and the design of the building has to be understood and considered when designing care environments. A supportive environment for both residents and care staff is a recognized dimension of quality of care and consequently the staff’s satisfaction with the care environment is important for the care given and in turn the older person’s wellbeing.

AIM
The aim with this study was to describe the care staff’s perception of older people’s residential care environments in terms of improvements to meet the users needs.

METHOD
This study has a qualitative design focusing on an open-ended question of a self-completion questionnaire. There was 50 nursing staff from 14 different residential care facilities included in the study. The questionnaire, Staff Perception of Older People’s Residential Care Environments (SPORE) contains items on staff satisfaction with the care environment together with an open-ended question on staff’s perception of the needs for environmental improvements. The responses were analyzed with content analysis.

RESULTS
According to the results, the care staff perceived deficiencies in the residential care environments and several aspects were highlighted as being in need of improvement. During the process of analysis, five categories emerged: Environments for physical support, Environments for cognitive support, Room for recreation, Access to outside areas, and Room space and building layout. These categories were found to be related to the possibilities to access the care environment and are represented by the theme Accessibility.

CONCLUSION
This study shows that the care staff perceives a need for improvements in order to offer accessible residential care environments. It is crucial that older people with disabilities can move around safely and independently, and find the way within and outside the building.
Therefore, it should be a core issue to design care environments with high accessibility to support this frail group of people.