

Multiculturalism as an Asset in Senior Care

A case study in a Swiss nursing home

Summer 2012

Caroline Vuagniaux

Institute of Socioeconomics and Centre for Interdisciplinary Gerontology

University of Geneva

Context / Purpose

The population of Switzerland is aging. The growth rate is still positive only thanks to immigration. Because of the general shrinking workforce and of the growing needs of the Eldercare, the Health sector is dependent on foreign workforce. What do senior patients think of this situation?

Method

Semi-structured interviews

Panel

Selected patients of the nursing home **La Fondation Les Baumettes** near Lausanne (French speaking area)

Issues

- Limited size of the panel
- Induced bias due to old age and cognitive problems of interviewees

Swiss Demographic Data

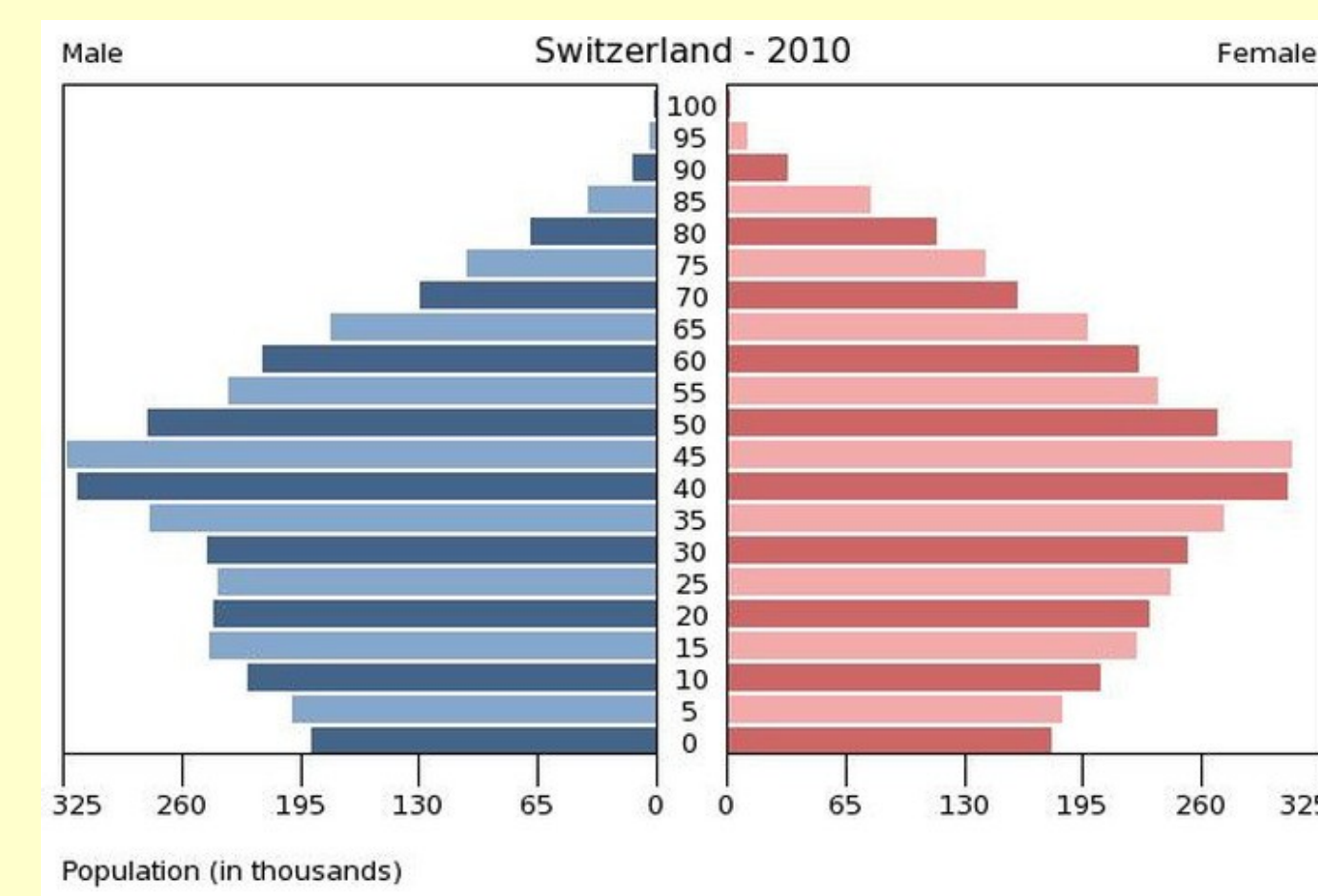


Figure A
Swiss Population, 2010

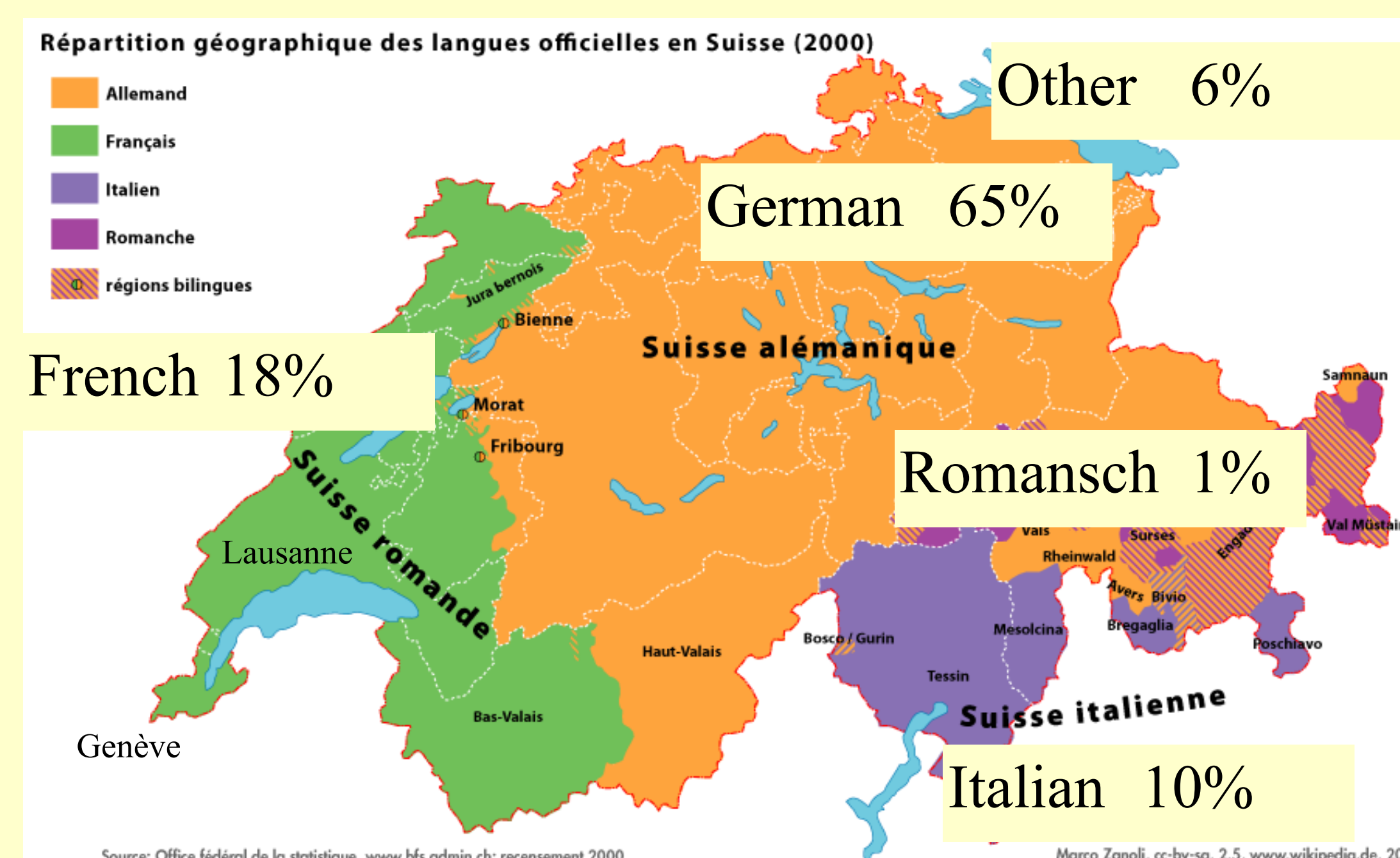


Figure B
Cultural + language Areas

Population 7.9 million

Growth rate 0.199%

65 years old and over 17%

Dependency rate 27.1%

Swiss Nationals ~75%

Foreign Permanent Residents ~25%

Life Expectancy male: 78.34 female: 84.16

Treasuring diversity all together !



Keywords

Social Aging
Foreign workers
Foreign patients
Multiculturalism
Cultural exchange



Senior Care in a Multicultural Country
In this Swiss nursing home, around one patient from Italy, ten nationalities are gathered

2. Results

Majority of the panel...
-did not know that care givers were of other nationalities than Swiss, and did not care about this

-was surprised by the number of different nationalities in the nursing home

-was aware of the shrinking of workforce and was feeling grateful towards the foreign caregivers coming to Switzerland to help them

>For the senior patients, skin color, country of origin and nationality do not matter, as long as caregivers speak French and communicate clearly and politely

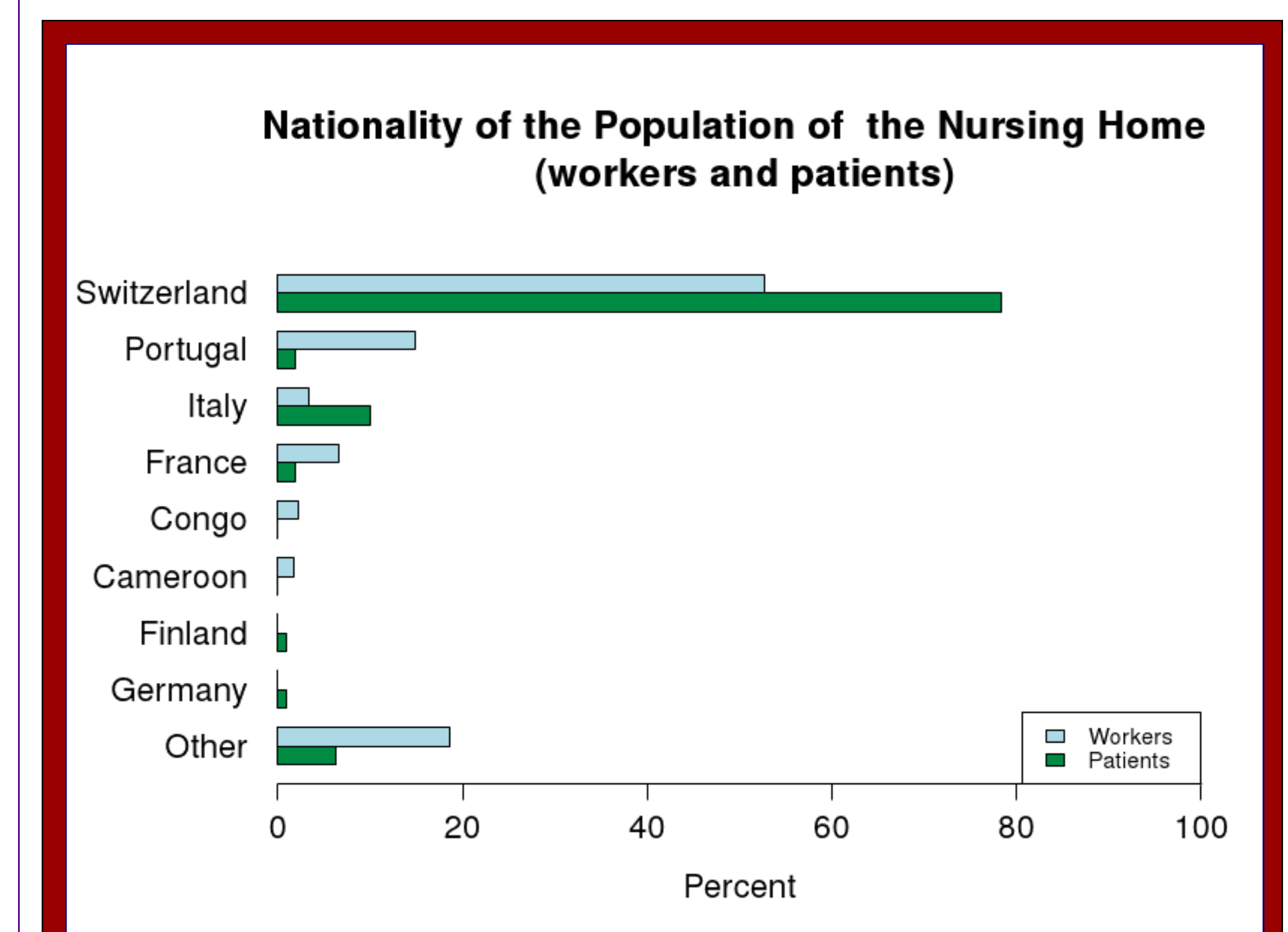
>Senior patients enjoy discovering other national food, music or habits as a way of
travelling without moving
and/or
escaping boredom and loneliness

1. Description / Data

The population of the nursing home reflects the multicultural face of Switzerland and illustrates the successive flows of immigration

Workers + Patients together =

37 nationalities!



4. Conclusion

-Swiss tradition of multiculturalism and open-mindedness is integrated by senior patients and important to them

-Multiculturalism is internalized as the positive norm and perceived by senior patients as the proper behavior to display

-For the senior patients, personality of workers and ability to communicate are more important than nationality

-Cultural exchange is positive for senior patients and enhances everyday life in the nursing home

Multiculturalism turns out to be an asset in Senior Care

3. Implications / Recommendations

This case study focuses on senior patients' perception of their foreign caregivers.

Further work could be done by interviewing caregivers to analyze how they cope with multiculturalism, and then widen the topic to study the effects of immigration on the workplace in the Swiss Health sector.



References:

Aging in Switzerland: Progress and Inequalities, Michel Oris, Catherine Ludwig, Stefano Cavalli, Center for Interdisciplinary Gerontology, University of Geneva, Switzerland; Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Geneva, Switzerland, Paper distributed at the 10th European Sociological Association Conference, Geneva, 2011.
Enjeux de la diversité culturelle dans l'interaction entre résidents migrants et professionnels de l'accompagnement, Etude financée par la Fondation Leenards, Professeur Eliane Christen-Guissaz, Unité de recherche en gérontologie, UNIGER, Lausanne, 2011.
Multicultural Switzerland and the challenge of Immigration, Presentation at the Stendhall University, Wolf Linder, Prof. Em., University of Bern, 2011.
L'immigration du personnel de santé vers la Suisse, Hélène Jaccard Ruedin, Marcel Widmer, Observatoire suisse de la Santé (OBSAN), Neuchâtel, 2010.
Recherche qualitative sur le personnel de santé étranger en Suisse et sur son recrutement, Kathrin Huber, Ewa Mariéthoz, Rapport de recherche, Conférence suisse des directrices et directeurs cantonaux de la santé, (CDS), Berne, 2010.

"This publication results from research work is executed within the framework of the Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research LIVES, which is financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation. The authors are grateful to the Swiss National Science Foundation for its financial support".

Contact: caroline.vuagniaux@gmail.com