



ABBY was good company for Lynda Ward, at a time she needed it most.

ABBY isn't a person, though. It's actually reminiscent of a radio from a bygone era, around which families would gather and listen to a show or a sports broadcast. In her childhood, Lynda may well have listened to such a radio. It's probably one of the reasons why she was so attracted to it at Hillside Psychiatric Centre in Kamloops, where she was living with dementia as a consequence of Alzheimer's disease before her passing in February.

But ABBY has other interesting features that also appealed to Lynda: a touchscreen, a steering wheel, switches and dials, and a faux cat.

"ABBY is kind of neat," says Cliff Ward, Lynda's husband, who witnessed the difference ABBY made for her and others with similar illnesses. "She paid more attention to it than anything else she tried for fun. She liked the cat and sat right down."

ABBY is an interactive technology for individuals living with dementia. The technology, created by Canadian company Ambient Activity Technologies (AAT), uses software to integrate touch, sight, and sound experiences in a wall-mounted terminal.

“Our goal is to provide easily accessible, meaningful activity for inpatients.

"Hillside Centre is the first hospital environment in the world to integrate ABBY technology," says Marc Kanik, Managing Director at AAT.

"It was incredible to see how the patients responded to ABBY," says Sarah Farmer, Manager at Hillside Centre. "Some patients who showed little interest in their environment immediately began stroking the cat, 'driving,' and watching pictures on the screen, or listening to old songs on the radio."

"It's amazing how little things can trigger happy, nostalgic memories in these patients."

AAT even created custom content based on Kamloops and the surrounding region, such as video of driving the streets of Kamloops and the Shuswap Road. Hillside staff provided their favourite pictures of the area, which were also integrated into ABBY's activities.

Dr. Carol Ward, a geriatric psychiatrist at Hillside Centre and a Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of British Columbia, is thrilled to pilot this innovative technology in Hillside's 12-bed geriatric psychiatry specialty unit.

"Our goal is to provide easily accessible, meaningful activity for inpatients," says Dr. Ward. "We are also evaluating the impact of ABBY on staff's ability to help patients engage in pleasurable and easy-to-access activity. ABBY has been a great addition to our unit."

Dr. Ward views ABBY as a continually evolving technology. "We would love to take this initiative to the next level which would be to individualize ABBY content that is person specific," she says. ☺

Lynda Ward, a patient at Hillside Centre, and husband Cliff Ward, spent time with ABBY.

