



One last time to the beach: Design for a last wish

*Design by Chenyi Shao
Text by Pieter Desmet*

What are you doing this weekend? Perhaps a day at the beach. Getting some fresh air. Or coffee with family, visiting a museum or concert. These kinds of outings are pretty self-evident for many of us. But that is not the case for everyone. For people who do not have much longer to live, such a simple outing can be far from evident. Then it may even be a last wish: one last time to the beach. Feeling the sand and hearing the sound of the sea one more time. Fortunately, the WensAmbulance can make this happen. With a team of volunteers, it transports the terminally ill to their favourite place one last time.

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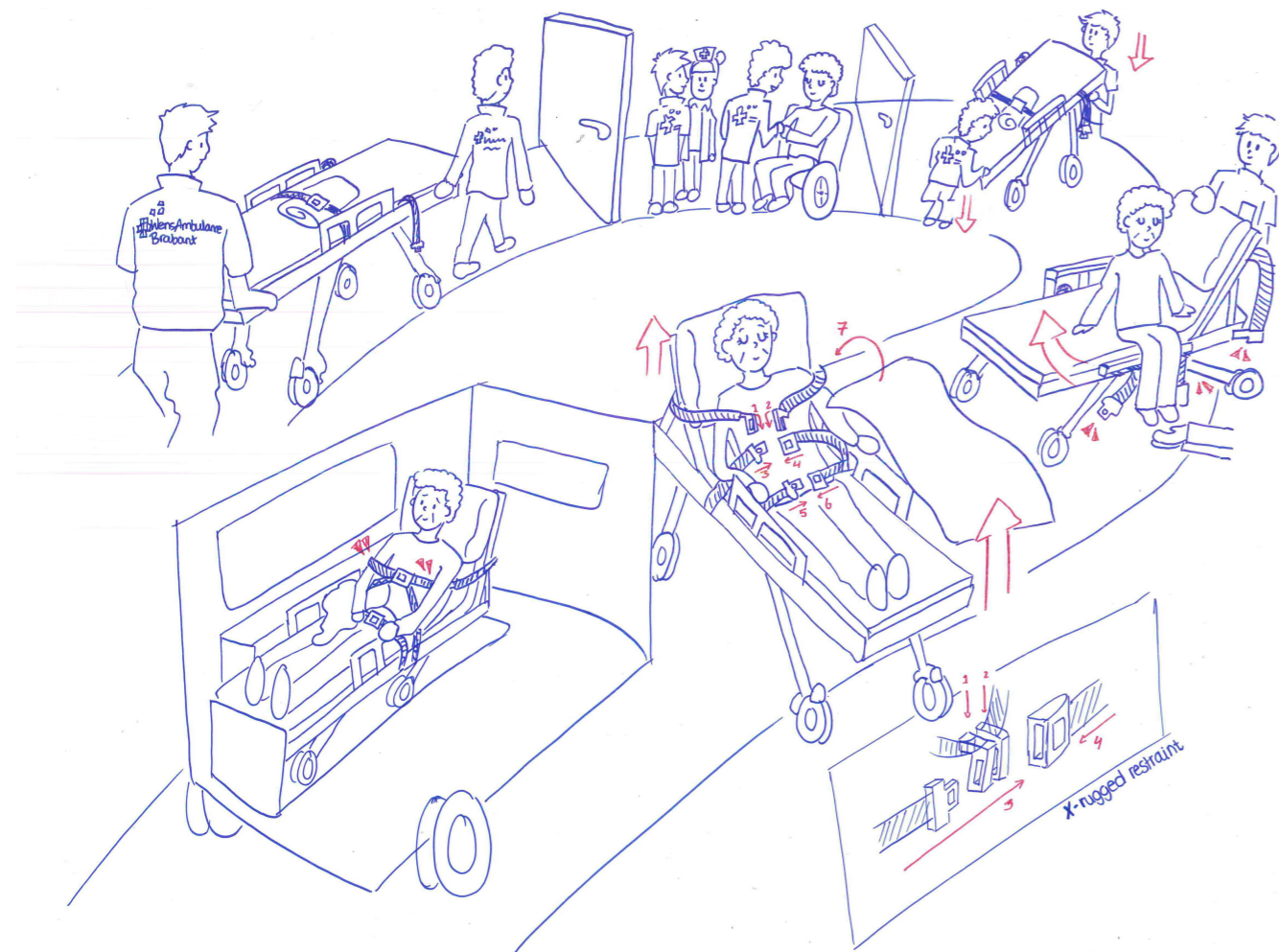


Interior of the WensAmbulance

One last wish

The Netherlands has a network of regional WensAmbulance foundations. These offer seriously ill people, with a limited life expectancy, the opportunity to say goodbye to life in a personal way. Each individual has their own perspective of a 'good death,' but many people who know that their lives will end shortly value a sense of completion. Letting one last

wish come true in the final stage of life can therefore make a significant contribution to the quality of life. With accompanied ambulance transport, the WensAmbulance helps to fulfil such a wish — sometimes a final unique life experience for their clients.



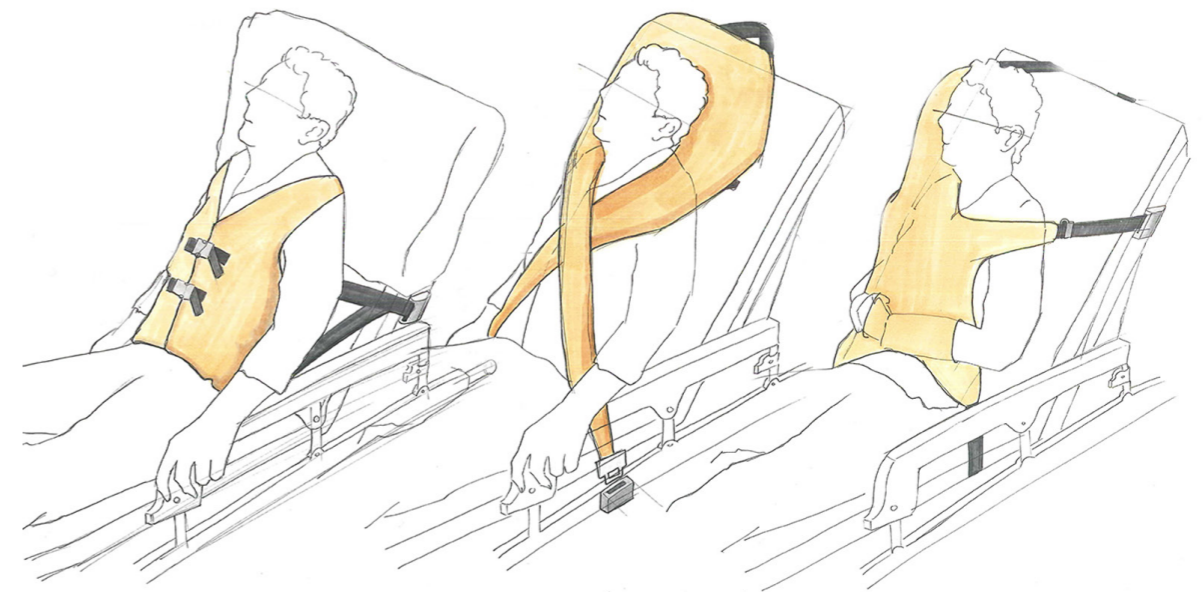
The first part of the wish ride (from pick-up to taking a seat in the transport)

The wish ride

Inspired by the Wish Ambulance, designer Chenyi Shao set out to explore how to optimise the wish ride. She carefully mapped out the entire wish journey, from pick-up, the actual ride to the desired location, including the return journey. She found multiple leads for improving the experience. She chose to redesign the belt system of the stretcher used for transportation. The current system is optimised for regular ambulance use — not for wish rides. One requirement is central for an ambulance ride to the hospital: safety. This is guaranteed with a double belt: an X-belt over the shoulders in combination with a hip belt that straps the patient to the stretcher.



Compromise in the use of the belt system during a wish ride



Patient versus client

Safety is of course paramount for a wish ride, but comfort and freedom of movement are just as important. The regular stretcher and belt look stiff and sterile. They give a client the appearance of a 'passive' patient, which can cause feelings of shame. In addition, negative associations from previous ambulance experiences can generate feelings of anxiety. Because the stretcher is too hard and uncomfortable for wish rides, an extra mattress and pillow is used. This is pleasant, but it also has its disadvantages: due to the extra volume, the belts cannot always be properly positioned, which has a negative effect on safety and comfort. In addition, the X-fixation is not always applied during the ride to give clients more freedom of movement.

Design sketches



The interaction of an embrace

The wish ride shawl

Chenyi designed the 'wish ride shawl: a combination of a blanket and a seat belt. The shawl has a friendly and homely appearance. The material is soft and warm; it feels like an embrace. It reduces the 'passive patient' association, and therefore feelings of shame and fear prior to the wish ride. The shawl fixates and at the same time provides room for movement. This supports the interactions between the client and the other passengers (a professional volunteer and family member). The overall experience is much more that of a group of people on the way to

a meaningful destination, than that of an 'object to be transported'. The client can easily operate the belt buckle themselves, for example to hug loved ones when saying goodbye. Many clients want to take a nap to rest on the return trip. The shawl provides the necessary stability and comfort. The pockets allow clients to fix their hands and keep themselves warm in an intuitive and pleasant way. Finally: because the cushion cannot move during the ride, the volunteers no longer have to put it in place during the trip, which in turn has a positive effect on their own safety.

Designing to serve

Sometimes a design is grand and conceptual. But not always: a design can also be modest and serving. Although they are less prominent or eye-catching, they are certainly no less important. Because even a small intervention can have a major impact. That's how I view Chenyi's contribution. The WensAmbulance gives people an opportunity

for feelings of fulfilment. It is not about the journey, but about the destination. And yet, the ride is also part of the total experience. Every moment counts. In a modest way, Chenyi supports this experience with her shawl. If you don't pay attention, you don't see it. And that is precisely the beauty of her design: the power of modesty.



Prototype of the wish ride shawl



Chenyi Shao (photo) developed the shawl in 2018 as a graduation project for the Integrated Product Design master's programme in the "Design for End of Life Lab" for the WensAmbulance Brabant. The initial assignment was to optimise the mattress, because the wish ride was physically too strenuous for many clients. In consultation with the support team, it was decided to broaden the project by mapping all factors of discomfort. Supervisors were Marieke Sonneveld and Jeske Weerdestijn (TU Delft), and Ton van Pinxteren (WensAmbulance Brabant). Chenyi is currently studying veterinary medicine at the University of Ghent.

Colophon

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Reference

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