

Dementia–The Worldwide Burden. We Need to Act

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Introduction

Dementia is an important social and health care problem worldwide. The countries are dealing with this problem the best way they can. Therefore Alzheimer Europe launched the Glasgow Declaration in 2014, and the same day it was adopted unanimously by delegates from 26 Alzheimer Europe member organisations. In Slovenia, which is really a small central European country with a population of only 2 069 815 inhabitants [1] 1752 people signed the Glasgow Declaration. This puts our country at the first place among all the signatures countries. The aim of Glasgow Declaration is to recognise dementia as a public health priority and to develop a global action plan on dementia and national strategies in every country in Europe, and finally to promote the rights, dignity and autonomy of people living with dementia [2]. Slovenia accepted the National strategy in April 2016, and now is the right time to move forward and to put strategies into practice.

As we all know dementia is a chronic illness that progresses over the years to such an extent that the person is completely dependent on the help of others. The majority of people with dementia live at home with their family. Relatives often constitute the main source of care for the elderly with dementia. The task of caring for an elderly with dementia a lot of times requires from caregivers almost exclusive dedication 24 h a day.

Caregiving for person with dementia is associated with exacerbated stress and burden that can impact the health and well-being of those providing care. Spouses and adult children are the majority of these caregivers and their needs and vulnerabilities often differ [3].

We usually promote an individual approach when administering help to a patient, however we often forget, that caregivers to need this kind of approach.

Older caregivers seem to be more vulnerable to burden, though younger individuals may suffer more with isolation and greater social restrictions, proportional to the greater possibilities of social activities and leisure available for their age range [4].

I am in the middle of a research about the needs of dementia caregivers in Slovenia and I cannot forget the next remark of an older

male caregiver: »I would like to receive a help when I need a help, not when the healthcare providers offer me help«.

I believe he has a point. We really do offer many different forms of support for caregivers like lectures, SOS telephone, in-home care, day care centres and so on. However all these interventions are not available 24 h a day, meanwhile caregivers provide care 24 h 365 days a year without a rest. So therefore we need to strive to promote and offer a help available 24 h 7 days a week so that carers would have a chance to get help when they need it. Furthermore the majority of caregivers pointed out they would like to receive direct forms of care like day care and in home assistance. Maybe younger carers would prefer day care support also during the weekend, so they can spend some time with their partners and friends, and on the other hand older carers would benefit more from home-care assistance.

Caregivers play a crucial role for people with dementia, thus providing care for their loved ones they often forget about their own health. At the end the family ends up with two sick relatives. Therefore it is vital to understand the needs of each carer and provide him individualized physical and mental support from the diagnosis of dementia and through the process of grieving.

The signing of the Glasgow Declaration is certainly the stepping stone of improvement the support and promotion of the rights, dignity and autonomy of people living with dementia, but also their relatives. So now is the right time to act.

References

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