

Foreign Caregivers, Dementia and Everything in Between

Adamit Tal

Adamit Tal, MSc, OT, Home Rehabilitation Therapist, Maccabi and Clalit Healthcare Services; Research Assistant, Ono Academic College, School of Health Professions, Occupational Therapy Department. adamit33@bezeqint.net

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As a result of the prevalence of dementia and its multifold ramifications for the individual and his/her environment, this illness represents not merely a medical problem but also a familial, social, communal and financial problem as well. Dementia is a chronic and degenerative disease that causes memory and cognitive problems, as well as the loss of independent functioning. As a person's function deteriorates, it becomes necessary to provide him/her with help and support for day-to-day functioning. This help is usually provided by formal/paid caregivers. Despite the increased dependence on formally employed caregivers in developed countries and specifically in Israel, the research on this demographic segment is quite sparse. Health care professionals who work with the geriatric population, maintain daily contact with foreign caregivers. Yet, very little is known about their level of knowledge and perception of dementia. As the disease progresses, the formal caregiver becomes the major client. The therapists must rely on the caregivers to provide the daily intervention required for the person with dementia, and simultaneously work to enhance the caregiver's skills and coping strategies. Occupational therapy intervention for a community dwelling client with dementia is extremely challenging. The therapist must deal simultaneously with the elderly client, the foreign caregiver and family members, find the right balance between all their needs, and provide the most appropriate solutions. Given the paucity of research and the limited knowledge base that exists, it is not surprising that there is as yet no focused intervention program that relates concomitantly to the needs of the elderly client, the formal/paid caregiver, and the client's family - the informal caregivers. Occupational

therapy professionals can provide the basic knowledge regarding performance skills, areas of function, and the quality of life of the elderly client as well as the foreign caregiver by relating to their environment and to its physical, social, cultural and spiritual contexts.