Dementia-friendly Community Pharmacy

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BACKGROUND AND AIDS

Increasingly, caring for people with dementia is acknowledged to be an important issue in palliative care, aiming at supporting dignity and quality of life for people living with dementia and their caregivers. When caring for a relative or friend living with dementia, relationships and roles between people living with dementia and their caregivers, who are for the most part women, are changing. Caregivers are fulfilling different duties, which show some variability over time, ranging from care tasks such as washing and dressing to making arrangements concerning financial and legal issues and organizing professional support and care. Taking care for a relative or friend living with dementia is time-consuming, and caregivers may be confronted with difficult decisions. For many of them, care giving turns out to be burdensome, although care giving can also be associated with fulfillment. This situation might be augmented as dementia still is a taboo in society, creating additional barriers to seeking support.

Professionals in health and social care, on the other hand, frequently find themselves in situations where specific communication skills and collaboration with family caregivers and other professionals are paramount in order to ensure good care. However, in the field of health care, dementia is conceptualized solely as a medical condition, placing issues related to living with somebody with dementia and the organization of care at the context level which seems unchanged in terms of interventions or out of reach for health care professionals. A common narrative, exacerbated by the fact that there exists no medical cure for dementia, states that “nothing can be done”, which might lead to abandonment.

The project “Dementia-friendly Community Pharmacy” aims at promoting health and wellbeing for families, informal caregivers and people living with dementia via fostering the implementation of needs-based, person-centered care in community pharmacies, thereby developing a health-promoting community pharmacy environment. Community pharmacies have been chosen because people living with dementia and their caregivers are regular users of community pharmacy services. Pharmacies are an easily accessible health care setting within the wider community setting, therefore offering specific opportunities for health promoting interventions. Conceptually, the project is based on principles of health promotion and palliative care – the settings approach and re-orienting health services, following a resource-orientation and aiming at participation and empowerment of all actors, thus fostering dignity and quality of life and reducing stigma.

METHODS

Participatory research is used as an approach to ensure participation of all partners involved in the development of health promoting interventions: This means equal collaboration between research and practice in all processes and in knowledge generation, realizing the project in repetitive loops of action, reflection and evaluation. Caregivers and people living with dementia are involved as community partners, community pharmacies, counseling services and other community based services as well as health promotion organizations and palliative care experts as practice partners and the project team as research partners. These partners will also form the steering group and the advisory group of the project. Interventions in the community pharmacy setting and in the wider community setting aim at strengthening communication skills and networking activities in community pharmacies, as well as breaking the taboo of dementia especially at the community level. Methods used are focus groups, interviews, workshops, and networking activities.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- Building partnerships right from the beginning with self help and representatives from community pharmacy, as well as health promotion organizations has proven to be a key element of the project so far in order to creating a shared approach on developing a health promoting community pharmacy setting.
- First results from the needs assessment with caregivers support earlier findings related to caregiver burden and the need for a better integration of health and social care services. Furthermore, breaking the taboo and de-stigmatizing dementia in the general public are key issues.
- Representatives from self-help support the notion of community pharmacy being an important setting for person-centered care and health promotion, at the same time pointing at potential pitfalls concerning the double feature of community pharmacies as health care organizations and commercial enterprises.
- An analysis of policy papers has shown that the community pharmacy is perceived by European professional bodies as a promising setting for dementia care services. Concerning models of good practice, besides services related to medicine management, preventive and health promoting services are offered to people living with dementia and their relatives, and to some extent, cooperation with self-help groups can be found. In Austria though, the prevailing professional focus seems to be on pharmacological issues and management of medication. However, selected community pharmacies have implemented services for people living with dementia and their caregivers prior to the project which may serve as models of good practice.

Ongoing partnership building, i.e. involving caregivers and people living with dementia as well as community pharmacies equally in the development of health promoting care services by expanding the “pharmacological focus” to a broader people centered, health promoting care focus will be a key issue in the next phase of the project.

References

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