



Editorial

Social work and the quality of life of those cared for and caring for them

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Both those cared for and those caring for them (formal or informal carers or nurses) are confronted with complex situations that are difficult for them because some of the people in their social environment (e.g., members of medical and social service staff, managers, employers, relatives, public administration workers, etc.) are not supportive in fulfilling their wishes. Therefore, it is difficult for them to live in accordance with their wishes. This means that those cared for, as well as those caring for them, cannot enjoy their preferred quality of life.

What can social workers do to improve the quality of life of those who are cared for and those who are caring for them? First, they can listen to the wishes of those cared for, as well as those caring for them. Second, they can negotiate modifications of their wishes and the attitudes of people in their social environment towards the wishes of those cared for, as well as those caring for them. Third, they can negotiate a modification of the circumstances to promote fulfilment of the wishes of those cared for and those who provide care.

The first step is listening to the wishes of those cared for, as well as those caring for them, and arranging a change if those cared for or those caring for them cannot fulfil their wishes because someone in their social environment is not conducive to this. To make such a change means promoting the responsiveness of those who are not supportive of the wishes of those cared for or those caring. And *vice versa*, to promote understanding of those cared for or those caring for them towards nonresponsive attitudes of people who are not conducive to their wishes. In short, to promote mutual understanding (which does not necessarily mean mutual acceptance).

The lack of support for the wishes of those cared for and those caring for them (hereafter “those helped”) may have various reasons. People in the social environment may be unaware of the wishes of those helped; either because those who are being helped have not revealed their wishes, or because people

in their social environment have not listened to their voice. Why don't they listen? Because they don't think the wishes of those cared for or those caring for them are important (which often medical or social service staff do). Or because members of medical and social service staff, managers, employers, relatives, public administration workers etc., have enough on their plate. Or because the wishes of those helped remind them of something painful and so they don't want to hear such a wish (which often concerns relatives and caregivers who are in close contact with those being cared for). Another reason could be that members of medical and social service staff, managers, employers, public administration workers etc., see it as their job to carry out established procedures and decisions that do not include attention to the wishes of those who are helped – or they outright deny it. People in the social environment may know the wishes of those helped, but show a lack of support for them because they believe these wishes are irrational, immoral, socially undesirable, or even pathologic.

The social worker's job is to encourage non-supportive members in the social environment to ask the question: What does this person really want? And why do they want it? Why is it important to him or her? Those helped need to be encouraged to voice their wishes and to try to understand why others react either indifferently, with acceptance, dismissively, or favourably.

Second, if people understand what they want and why, then it is possible to start negotiating a change of attitude towards the wishes of those helped, and a partial change of the wishes by those cared for or those who care for them.

Third, if the wishes of those helped become mutually acceptable (if not outright welcomed), it is possible to start negotiating the terms of its implementation and establishing favourable circumstances for those cared for or those who care to live in accordance with their wishes.

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