Placing a spouse in a care home for older people: (Re)-Constructing Roles and Relationships

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Akademisk avhandling

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ABSTRACT


This thesis explores the process of placing a spouse in a care home for older people from the perspectives of the key actors involved. Due to the lack of previous studies in this area in Sweden and the desire to generate new insights that have the potential to inform practice developments a grounded theory methodology was adopted.

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews (70 in total) with spouses, adult children, community based staff and staff in care homes. Analyses of these data suggested that placement is best interpreted as a temporal experience comprising four stages: making the decision, making the move, adjusting to the move and reorientation. Each of the key actors offered differing insights into the way that the process as a whole was experienced with it emerging that in the initial two phases the primary focus was on the practical and instrumental aspects of the move, with the emotional consequences being largely overlooked. This is a key issue as spouses were usually unprepared for the sense of separation and loss that the placement caused. Subsequently, spouses placed particular importance on maintaining their sense of involvement with their partner by a variety of ‘keeping’ activities. However, children and staff in care homes shared varying degrees of ‘awareness’ which influenced the way that relationships were forged.

Based on a synthesis of the data the core category and basic social process that emerged was termed ‘(re)-constructing roles and relationships’. This highlights the subtle and dynamic way that placement unfolds and reinforces the importance of understanding the process from multiple perspectives. In addition to providing new theoretical insights the thesis identifies a number of ways in which the placement process could be improved and suggests the need for more open and explicit discussion of a number of aspects, particularly the ways in which expectations of roles and relationships change over time. This is essential if spouses are to be better prepared and supported both for the sense of separation from their partner and for the need to integrate into the care home setting.

Key words: family carers, care home placement, partnership, adult children, community staff, nursing staff, carer support, grounded theory.

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