

Editorial

Caring About Eldery Care

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Illustration Julie Kordovsky

Elderly care is low on status and high on urgency. Demographic projections predict an ageing population that faces multiple morbidities and thus more varied and extended care needs. This demographic shift is a matter of global concern, and one that nations in the Global North are ill equipped to address (Rouzet et al., 2019). However, many countries around the globe, including those who mainly rely on the family as care provider, are witnessing changes in intergenerational relationships affecting the nature and practices of elderly care (Gangopadhyay, 2021; Adamek, Chane, & Kotecho, 2020).

Care for elderly people follows various paths across societies (Keisu et al., 2016). In Scandinavia, from where this special issue comes to you, it is almost a given that elderly care refers to professional treatment, while, at the same time, elderly care workers occupy a subordinate position in several hierarchies: a) a gender hierarchy in which care work is associated with unpaid work performed by women in the home (Høst & Larsen, 2018); b) a professional hierarchy in which care workers are positioned below nurses and doctors; and c) a ‘dirt’ hierarchy where work with the body and its maintenance or decay falls below work with tools (Liveng, 2007). The technical and medical aspects of care have been elevated, and reforms have been implemented to improve quality and efficiency while simultaneously changing the notion of care work from treating illness towards rehabilitation (Oeseburg et al., 2015). Despite these tensions and changes, care workers report that they find their work meaningful and rewarding (Colombo et al., 2011).

Elderly care is also embedded in ethical and political/philosophical bodies of literature, and various scholars have shown the complexity of the word ‘care’. Mol (2008) suggested a ‘logic of care’ involving ambivalences, disagreements, insecurity, misunderstandings, and conflicts. Waerness (1984) suggested a ‘rationality of caring’, arguing that we must pay attention to the specific qualities inherent in caregiving work. The rationality of caring is different from scientific rationality which aims at controlling the environment, she argues. Caring addresses the relations between people and includes a range of human experiences that have to do with feeling concern for and taking care of other people’s well-being. Defining care in a political sense, as an ideal for democracy, Tronto (2001) refers to care as everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’.

In this special issue, we present fresh perspectives, curious questions, and careful investigations and analyses of the notion of care and of what care for the elderly means,

how it is practised and what might be the future of elderly care. Our aspiration is to put together a collection of papers that link ‘global care’ as a (bio)political and democratic term to ‘local care’ as an everyday practice of care receivers and caregivers (paid and unpaid, volunteer and non-volunteer), and including the political, societal and ethical aspects of organizing, practising, and researching elderly care. In this vein, we also invited methodological reflections on researcher stance and ways to represent elderly care research.

Collectively, the articles presented explore different facets of care in the context of elderly care, caregiving, and researching care. They address the complex dynamics and challenges faced by individuals involved in care, whether they are healthcare professionals, informal caregivers, or those receiving care. Despite the variations in specific topics and methodologies, the thematic relation among these articles is centred around understanding and examining the various dimensions of care, such as caregiver interaction and culture, ethics and autonomy, learning, knowledge and innovation, and the role of technology.

Several of the articles delve into the experiences, dilemmas, and challenges faced by caregivers and care workers. They shed light on the emotional, embodied, and ethical aspects of caregiving and the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the caregiver's role. Caring cultures and interprofessional communication are stressed as significant for an environment that promotes person-centred care. Some of the articles point to the balance between following guidelines and respecting the autonomy of care recipients, and to how embedded values often clash in practice. In this light, the role of technology in elderly care is explored, highlighting both its potential benefits and the challenges it poses. This relates to how technology influences and intersects with caregiving practices, with an economic rationale contrasting with holistic care ideals. Several articles emphasize the importance of learning and knowledge, including the need for person-centred education and training of care workers, for balancing learning logics, and for the transformative learning of embodied caregiving. One article studies the learning logics of elderly care, their links to knowledge forms and understandings of care work tasks, and how these understandings impact the quality of care. Another article points to the crucial mobilization of employee knowledge for the formation of innovative responses to societal challenges of elderly care. This article stresses that employee

knowledge needs to be formally mobilized and organized to contribute to these challenges. The last article of the issue underscores the significance of a caring research practice to understand, represent, and communicate the nature of care work and caregiving experiences. The author, Julie Kordovsky, suggests drawing as a caring research practice and has kindly offered to illustrate this editorial section. We hope you enjoy reading the issue.

Presentation of the articles

Sissel Merete Finholt-Pedersen's article 'Nurses' experience of caring amidst developments in welfare technology in elderly care' explores the dynamic relationship between holistic nursing care and the evolving landscape of welfare technology in Norwegian elderly care. Using a psychosocial approach and through the experiences of three nurses, narratives reveal a nuanced portrayal of caregiving practices and differing technological integration.

The author introduces the concept of 'general vagueness of communication' to unveil not only a lack of consensus among nurses but also the shared symbols that shape nurses' self-identities and their work with care amidst technology. The article emphasizes the importance of viewing welfare technology devices not merely as utilitarian tools but as symbolic agents triggering emotions and shaping subjective experiences. An evolving narrative of technology in elderly care, driven by economic rationality and neo-liberal ideals, is evident. The author finds that nurses' discussions about care, welfare technology, and patients tend to be general and elusive. Nonetheless, this vague communication helps maintain everyday cohesion, even if it conceals differences and relies on emotional compensations and tacit knowledge.

Britta Møller and Anne-Birgitte Nyhus Rohwedder's article 'Interacting logics of learning and knowledge in elderly care' argues for a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between learning logics, forms of knowledge, and problem solving in elderly care. Based on interviews with care workers in Danish nursing homes and drawing on Ellström and Dewey, the article identifies three learning logics: reproductive (prioritizing standardized procedures and *a priori* knowledge), developmental (emphasizing

experience-based knowledge and adaptation to complexity), and a problematic ‘not-learning’ logic.

The paper presents a conceptual model differentiating between simple and complex problem-solving tasks in elderly care. It underscores the need to strike a balance between reproductive and developmental learning logics and suggests a shift in the perception of care quality. Quality, the authors claim, should not be solely based on standardization but should also consider the care worker's ability to navigate complexity, utilize experience-based knowledge, and engage in reflective practices with colleagues.

The article “‘It can be difficult to help them’”: Colliding logics of care and choice in Danish elder care for older citizens with substance use’ is authored by **Jonas Strandholdt Bach, Bagga Bjerger and Johanne Korsdal Sørensen**. Inspired by Annemarie Mol’s notion of ‘logics of care’, this article sheds light on how bridging care, autonomy, and substance use puts strains on care professionals. The authors find that the logic of performing ‘correct care’ according to standards and ethics interferes with a ‘logic of choice’ respecting the autonomy of the individual. The clash of values between standardized care and citizens’ autonomy often results in care rejection, highlighting care workers’ emotional challenges when dealing with individuals living on the edge of societal norms. However, the authors state, care professionals are ill equipped to handle this balance. While the care workers acknowledge the importance of building trusting relationships with citizens, they find this aspect particularly challenging when substances are affecting health and behaviour.

Furthermore, the article addresses the lack of coordination and communication within the care sector when working with citizens with substance use, resulting in them ‘falling between the cracks’ in the cross-sectional system. Care professionals find that their input is not taken seriously and often face rejection from doctors and psychiatric systems when addressing the circumstances of citizens with substance use.

Diana Cochran’s article, entitled ‘Loving her to the end’, recounts her personal journey of managing and caring for a family member over a six-year period. The aim of sharing her autobiographic narrative is to convey the insights gained from the challenges and rewards of providing care to a loved one until the end of their life. Informed by adult

transformative learning theory, the paper discusses caregiving as the embodiment of the experience of the loved one. This means repeatedly immersing oneself in their world to truly understand them and their unique perspective. The author observes that, in such situations, the roles of caregiver and care receiver often become reversed, requiring the relative to take on the role of decision maker for their loved one. However, the author identifies a dilemma in this dynamic, as it is crucial for the loved one to maintain some degree of control and influence over their own life decisions. This dilemma necessitates ongoing learning on the part of the relative, who must continuously familiarize themselves with their loved one's needs, preferences, and personality. In the author's words, this entails perspectivism and embodied care giving.

The article 'Who knows? Mobilization of employee knowledge in nursing homes' by **Stian Bragtvedt and Ragnhild Waldahl** explores the often-overlooked resource of employee knowledge in innovative solutions to the 'twin challenge' of a shrinking workforce and economic strains in elderly care. The article contends that employee knowledge, comprising both tacit and codified dimensions, stands as a valuable resource for innovation. Drawing on Ellström, distinct types of knowledge mobilization are unveiled, operating at different levels of problem articulation and employee involvement. This perspective challenges the prevalent reliance on technological solutions and underscores the significance of everyday cultural practices in the nursing home environment. The article provides a nuanced exploration of how different levels of knowledge mobilization intersect with the logics of care and economization and constrain innovative solutions.

The article 'Reciprocity and caregiver competencies. An explorative study of Person-Attuned Interaction in dementia care' is authored by **Hanne Mette Ochsner Ridder, Jens Anderson-Ingstrup, Julie Kolbe Krøier and Orii McDermott**. To conceptualize caregiver competences in person-centred dementia care, this contribution distils insights from a collaborative exploration involving a research group comprising music therapists and nurses engaged in Lego Serious Play and hermeneutic constructivism. Drawing on Tom Kitwood's conceptualization, the authors examine caregivers' interactions, responsibilities, relational competencies, and structural requirements crucial in dementia

care. The article underscores the importance of the facilitating of personal engagement, fine-tuned introspection, and mentalization within a professional and supportive culture of care. The authors highlight the significance of education, training, supervision, and public policy enforcement concerning micro-level interactions and interpersonal processes in person-attuned interactions.

Julie Kordovsky’s article ‘Rummaging around in a handbag of caring research: On searching for a pencil and a moral compass’ proposes a ‘caring research practice’ anchored in relational ethics. The article argues for an improved representation of elderly care respecting the culture, values, and ethics of care, and explores the concept of care, expanding upon Tronto’s emphasis on maintaining, continuing, and repairing our world. The author considers drawing as a form of inquiry, aligning with the ethics of care to engage with the elderly care field, fostering attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness—key elements outlined by Tronto in her care ethics framework.

The article weaves together theoretical concepts, research methodologies, and practical applications, making a case for a caring research approach in addressing the challenges faced by the Danish elderly care sector. The article not only highlights the urgency of the issue, but also offers a thoughtful and innovative path forward.

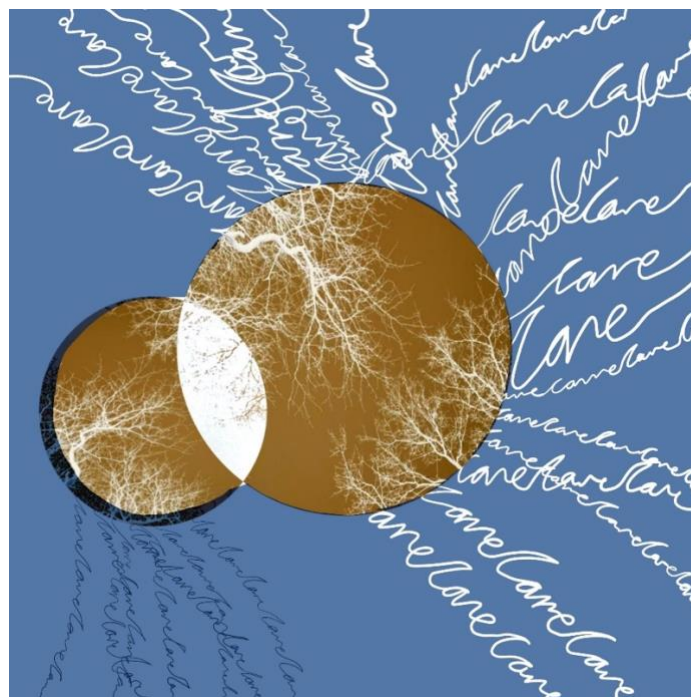


Illustration Julie Kordovsky

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Britta Møller is a Ph.D. in learning, and studies workplace learning and education, specialized in elderly care. Britta is employed as an assistant professor at the department of Culture and Learning, Aalborg University. She is the coordinator for the Master in Leadership and Organizational Psychology and member of the research group CO-LEARN and FoCUS – a research center for education for social- and health care.

Charlotte Wegener is associate professor at the Department of Communication and Psychology, Aalborg University, Denmark. She researches social innovation in elderly care organizations and education with a particular interest in learning across organizational and professional boundaries. Inspired by her background in music science and literature, she is passionate about language as material and seeks to expand academic writing by involving fiction, music, and everyday life experiences.