



«Believe me, there is not much leeway...»

Health care executives' perspectives on distance caregiving

The objective of the **DiCa santé study** was to explore executives' views, experiences and corporate framework conditions related to distance caregiving. In summer 2019, **15 guideline-based interviews** were conducted with **executives and healthcare specialists** in Swiss hospitals and nursing homes.

RESULTS FROM THE INTERVIEWS

The executives' **awareness** of distance caregiving is rather limited. They are dealing with the issue when it comes to short-term leaves due to emergencies.

Lack of **orientation framework** or formal policies: None of the companies regulates distance caregiving in a case-independent and prospective manner.

Supervisors feel compelled to provide **individual support**. However, **contextual factors** such as a shortage of skilled care workers, tight budgets and high operational demands set narrow limits.

«If companies endorse supportive childcare policies but neglect the situation of eldercare from a distance, this creates difficult situations not only for employees but for employers as well.»

Distance caregivers: bear the entire financial consequences when being offered to swap shifts, reductions in work hours or unpaid leaves.

Team members: are heavily burdened, too – especially employees with low workloads.

Executives: experience their situation as dilemmatic, stressful, demanding.

But: Distance caregivers often **do not openly self-identify** due to internalized norms of family care being a private task. Employers don't hear about the employee's situation.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SUPERVISORS & COMPANIES

- Actively bring up 'distance caregiving' as an issue to be talked on companywide.
- Create agreements and regulations for a uniform operational handling: e.g. set up guarantee to increase workload after temporal reduction, define where to turn for support and counselling.
- Communication: address private care tasks regularly and in a binding manner.
- Job plans with realistic reserves, creation of replacement pools, build up solutions for substitution.

- Diverse composition of teams helps to distribute the 'burden'.
- Review and adapt regulations regularly, due to fluctuating care needs.

CONCLUSIONS

The exploratory study finds that 'distance caregiving' is not yet firmly anchored in corporate policies. Increased awareness as well as supportive action plans might have positive effects on all parties involved and ensure a sustainable corporate health and personnel management.

Literature

Franke, A., Kramer, B., Jann, P.M., van Holten, K., Zentgraf, A., Otto, U. & Bischofberger, I. (2019). Aktuelle Befunde zu «distance caregiving» – Was wissen wir und was (noch) nicht? *Z Gerontol Geriat* 52(6), 521–528.

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