

Family caregivers' experiences of providing care for hospitalized older people with a tracheostomy: a phenomenological study

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Abstract

Purpose – *The purpose of this paper is to describe family caregivers' experiences of providing care for older people with a tracheostomy during hospitalization.*

Design/methodology/approach – *A descriptive phenomenological approach was used in this study. A total of 40 family caregivers were interviewed face-to-face in medical-surgical wards. Data was analyzed using Giorgi's phenomenological method.*

Findings – *Family caregivers described meanings of providing care, learning how to provide care, caring activities, impacts of caregiving, support needs and qualities of being a caregiver. Meanings included filial responsibility, spousal attachment and end of life care. Caring activities were varied. Impacts experienced were reported as physical, psychological, social and financial. Caregivers expressed the need for information from the nursing team and assistance from their relatives. Positive caregiver qualities that were described included loving to provide care for older people and confidence and sincerity in caregiving.*

Practical implications – *Although caring for older people with a tracheostomy was difficult and came with challenging impacts, family caregivers were willing to support their loved ones due to feelings of family responsibility.*

Originality/value – *The paper addresses family participation in providing care for people with a tracheostomy. They experience physical, psychological, social and financial consequences of caregiving. Therefore, health-care professionals should support family caregivers with education, training and awareness of supports and resources for dealing with problematic impacts and other expressed needs.*

Keywords *Caregivers, Family, Older people, Qualitative research, Tracheostomy, Thailand*

Paper type *Research paper*

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Introduction

Tracheostomy is a procedure performed on critically ill patients who need prolonged mechanical ventilation (Voisin and Nseir, 2017). Particularly for older people, chronic illness and age-related respiratory system changes may cause acute lung disease or respiratory failure; thus, they may need long-duration intubation (Dermot Frengley *et al.*, 2014; Ehlenbach, 2014) – perhaps indefinitely, depending on their condition (Bergeron and Audet, 2016). In Thailand, one study by Disayabutr *et al.* (2013) found that the mean age of patients with a percutaneous dilatational tracheostomy was 68 years. The most common reason for tracheostomy was failure to wean from mechanical ventilation. A total of 41% of older adults who required mechanical ventilation later underwent tracheostomy

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