



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

International Journal of Nursing Studies

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/ijns

Guest Editorial

Self-care in long term conditions: Old news or new thinking?



Although most nurses learned about Orem's self-care theory at some point and some find the concept of self-care old and dusty, there is growing recognition of the need for people with chronic conditions to take responsibility for their health and to be actively involved in self-care. Of 8760 h in a year, patients spend on average only about 10 h or 0.001% annually with healthcare professionals (Riegel et al., 2017). This means that all other health maintenance, body monitoring, and symptom management activities are done by individuals and their families as self-care activities outside of the clinical or hospital setting. There is also growing awareness among healthcare professionals that supporting and empowering persons with long term conditions and helping them perform self-care will ultimately improve patient well-being, decrease morbidity and mortality, and reduce healthcare costs.

Research conducted over the past two decades has revealed the complexity of self-care and illustrated that a wide variety of factors influence the decisions that individuals make about engaging in self-care. Worldwide, there are substantial differences in health care systems, patient education approaches, and the role of nurses and other professionals in improving health outcomes of patients with long term disease. However, despite all these differences, there is international recognition of the importance of self-care and a worldwide call to improve self-care for persons with long term, non-communicable diseases (World Health Organization, 2014).

A challenge faced by clinicians and researchers is understanding the complex process of self-care. What exactly does self-care entail? Why are some people better at it than others? What factors interfere with the ability to perform self-care? Why do some choose to ignore the need to care for themselves? How can we help people perform self-care? What are the outcomes we can expect of those who perform self-care? Researchers in the area want to

develop appropriate, theory-driven interventions that support patients and their caregivers to maintain their health and manage their long term conditions, but identifying where, when, and how to intervene still eludes us.

To develop optimal self-care interventions that improve outcomes for chronically ill patients, we still need to know more about the factors that influence self-care. We need studies testing promising interventions and further development of relevant theory. To mark increasing recognition of the importance of self-care in long term illness we have been invited to edit a special issue of the *International Journal of Nursing Studies* for which we seek studies that address self-care defined broadly. We invite investigators from around the world, in all disciplines, and focused on any patient population to send us your best science for consideration for publication in this IJNS Special Issue.

References

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Barbara Riegel*

School of Nursing, University of Pennsylvania, USA

Tiny Jaarsma

Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Linköping, Sweden

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: briegel@nursing.upenn.edu (B. Riegel).