

# Evaluation of the collaboration and networking of an outreach assistance for people with dementia and their family caregivers – a qualitative study

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## Background

Collaboration is an essential component of the case management process in the context of networking and cooperation<sup>1</sup>. The latter plays an increasingly important role in continuous treatment planning and care for people with dementia<sup>2</sup>. Studies demonstrate positive effects for interdisciplinary collaboration on health care outcomes of people with dementia<sup>3, 4</sup>. Various barriers have been identified in clinical practice, which negatively affect the implementation of these forms of cooperation<sup>5</sup>. In order to implement successful collaboration, it seems necessary to describe practical approaches<sup>6</sup>. The present study is a core of the process evaluation of a case management approach with an outreach assistance for people with dementia and their family caregivers<sup>7</sup>.

## Objectives

The study examined the interdisciplinary collaboration with the Dementia Care Nurses (DCNs) in the project from the perspective of selected cooperation partners. The aim was to record exemplary experiences, factors for a successful collaboration and needs for dementia-specific care in the outpatient sector.

## Methods

- **Design:** expert interviews
- **Participants:** professionals from the social and health care sector
- **Inclusion criteria:** intensity and quality of contacts with the DCNs during the project period
- **Recruitment:** purposively, eligible participants were subjectively selected by the DCNs
- **Data collection:** semi-structured guide, by telephone, tape-recorded, transcribed verbatim
- **Data analysis:** deductive content analysis<sup>8</sup>

Tab. 1: Characteristics of the cooperation partners involved in the study

Sociodemographic characteristics	n= 8
Age, yrs (range)	44 (32-62)
Gender: female:male	5:3
Professional background:	
General practitioner	1
Specialist in in psychiatry and psychosomatics	2
Social worker	1
Neighborhood management staff	1
Volunteer agency coordinator	1
Employee of the self-help contact point for care	1
Employee of care service for support in daily life	1
Experience in the care and support of people with dementia, yrs (range)	11 (1,5-35)
Duration of the cooperation in the DCN-project, yrs (range)	3 (1,5-3)

## Results

According to the respondents, communication with the DCNs was mainly by telephone or by email. The accessibility and flexibility in the exchange were perceived as positive. In most cases, collaboration intensified during the course of the project. Besides the collaboration, the outreach character of the project is appreciated by all respondents:

*"[...] because this has really filled a gap that undoubtedly exists, because although there are very many counselling services from very different sides, but you has the impression that people of an older age in particular are completely overwhelmed by it." (specialist in in psychiatry and psychosomatics)*

Different forms of collaboration were reported. In addition to the mutual referral and care of clients, joint home visits with a medical cooperation partner and social workers took place in individual cases. In the voluntary sector, the DCNs conducted training for volunteers on the topic of dementia. Medical cooperation partners report relief with regard to psychosocial and organizational aspects of dementia care, but not with regard to medical activities. The accompaniment of patients by the DCNs was valued as an opportunity for a constructive, case-related exchange on needs and therapy options. From the perspective of social work, the DCN's support of families over time was described as particularly relieving, as longer-term support was not part of their own area of responsibility, but was necessary in certain cases:

*"Well, as I said, I can pull myself out of the case a bit with a clear conscience, that's what I appreciated the most. I knew that they were in good hands and that they were being taken care of on an ongoing basis, so to speak." (social worker)*

Tab. 2: Named facilitators and barriers of the collaboration process

Facilitators	Barriers
• Existence of a continuous contact person within the context of long-term support	• Lack of joint documentation (especially with GPs, specialists and social workers)
• Accessibility, expertise and professionalism of the DCNs	• SARS-CoV-2-pandemic
• Timely case takeover by the DCNs	• Irregular exchange on cases
• DCNs had experiences on regional offers and support services for people with dementia and family carers	• Established collaborations and structures within the networking also largely come to an end at the end of the project
• Provision of information materials by the DCNs	

## Conclusion

According to the results, the collaboration with the DCNs within the project duration demonstrated the feasibility, suggested acceptability and high satisfaction among the cooperation partners involved. In addition to the professionalism and knowledge of the DCNs as continuous contact person, individual experience values with regard to the mediation of regional help offers, aspects of personal contact and relationship building as well as organizational framework conditions and developments were considered essential for effective networking and collaboration. The study results are intended to contribute to the further development of the role of dementia care nurses. The findings will be incorporated into the Dementia Care Nurse qualification at the Halle School of Health Care (starting in September 2022).

Questions remain as to how and where the proven expert role of the DCN can be comprehensively implemented in standard outpatient care. The implementation of case management is a process that should lead to needs-oriented care structures and to new patterns of collaboration. For the case managers and also for the participating actors in the social and health care system, it is associated with new professional identities, comprehensive roles and behavioral patterns and must therefore be conceived and communicated transparently at an early stage of implementation<sup>9</sup>. Further research should investigate those aspects to promote interdisciplinary collaboration and networking within the case management for people with dementia in practice.

## Referenzen:

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