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## Meeting the needs of caregivers of patients with a severe mental illness

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Central in the presentation is the support of caregivers of persons with severe mental illness (SMI) by mental health nurses. Due to the policy of deinstitutionalization a growing number of people with SMI live in the community and rely on families and others for support. A substantial amount of literature shows that these caregivers suffer from increased psychological distress and incur a greater risk of developing a mental illness themselves—especially- depression and anxiety disorders. These caregivers also have more stress-related physical health problems. They need support in learning ways to handle the impact of the SMI on their lives

and their wellbeing. In daily practice mental health care nurses witness the impact of SMI on the daily lives of the client and the caregiver. Due to for instance role ambiguity and uncertainty about their own skills mental health nurses hesitate to support these caregivers. In the presentation the usefulness and necessity of caregiver support is discussed. A recently developed evidence-based nurse-led caregiver support intervention is presented as an example of a sound structure supporting mental health nurses in their support of these caregivers.

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