



PÅRØRENDE  
I DANMARK

(Carers Denmark)

## Press release

March 23, 2015

# BEING A CARER CAN DAMAGE YOUR HEALTH

**When someone suffers from a serious chronic or life-threatening disease, the family is affected too. A new survey of 1150 Danish family caregivers shows that too many carers fall ill themselves because of the physical and emotional stresses of caring for a relative.**

“I am incredibly tired”, “I feel powerless”, “My heart jumps every time the phone rings”, “I feel an emptiness I can’t explain”, “My back hurts from helping him with everything”, “I am beginning to suffer with arthritis in my hips and it is getting increasingly hard to help”.

This is how Danish carers describe their daily lives in a new, nationwide survey of their wellbeing. The survey shows that 18% of carers develop a chronic condition themselves as a direct result of caregiving, and depression, poor sleep quality, eating disorders and stress are among other problems reported by carers for patients with severe chronic or life-threatening diseases. Far too often, the needs of the carer are overlooked in the course of treating and providing for the patient.

### **Carers’ ill health is a disaster**

The survey was conducted by the recently established association Carers Denmark. While many other European countries have had such associations for years, it is the first association of carers for people with serious chronic or long-term physical illnesses in Denmark.

In addition to developing chronic conditions, almost half of the respondents (45%) feel low or depressed and over a third suffer from sleep problems (38 %) or develop stress (36 %) as a direct consequence of their caring role.

*“We are used to viewing carers as a resource, as helpers and supporters. But far too often, carers fall ill because of the pressures of providing care. It is nothing short of a disaster if carers themselves succumb and fall ill: where before you had one patient, you now have two – and who is to help them both? From a socioeconomic point of view it is also highly undesirable that carers become so overburdened that they can no longer shoulder the many tasks of caring”, says Marie Lenstrup, President of Carers Denmark.*

### **Training for caregivers is a must**

The survey also indicates why Danish carers feel as pressured as they do. 33 % of them feel that they lack knowledge of the help and support available from councils and other public sources. This is one issue the association hopes to convince politicians to address:

*“If our society wants family carers to continue to provide extensive care and perhaps even passes increased responsibilities on to them, then we must get better at looking after carers. We must provide them with the necessary knowledge and skills - about how to care for their relatives in the best way possible, and definitely also how to care for themselves! We believe carers for the chronically ill and for those with life-threatening conditions should be offered a carer training course. This should provide them with skills related to various care tasks, advise them on their rights and options, and help them master their lives. In addition, we believe that every local authority should employ a caregiver consultant, who can facilitate local networks for carers. The findings of our survey sadly confirm that such initiatives are urgently needed”, says Marie Lenstrup.*

#### **Fact sheet: Carers Denmark**

Carers Denmark is a nationwide organization that speaks up on issues of interest to carers across all somatic diagnoses. The association provides information and support to empower carers and encourage them to take better care of themselves, which will also make them more stable caregivers for their loved ones.

For more information, visit [www.paaroer.dk/danishcarers](http://www.paaroer.dk/danishcarers)

#### **About the survey**

The survey was conducted among 1150 primary and secondary carers for the chronically or terminally ill. The study was carried out by Kompas Kommunikation on behalf of Carers Denmark and was sponsored by AbbVie. The survey was conducted via the Internet during the period October 2014 - January 2015. To ensure representative results, responses were subsequently weighted by gender, age and region to reflect current demographic data as provided by Statistics Denmark. The survey data are owned by Carers Denmark and may not be used without crediting the association.