

## Care for Caregivers - A Mission for Primary Care

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### Abstract

The number of elderly people living in the community who are limited in daily activities is increasing worldwide. This generates prolonged care, which usually falls on one family member, the family caregiver. Caregivers are prone to develop psychosocial and physical symptoms. As a result, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued a clear directive to assess and support these caregivers. The main goals of this study were to assess primary care physicians' (PCP) awareness to caregivers' health risks and the extent that they recommended preventive measures to maintain the health of the caregivers. As no suitable instrument existed, a secondary goal was to develop a scale to measure physicians' awareness to caregivers' health and preventive treatment and test its psychometric properties.

**Methods:** Data were collected from a convenience sample of 201 PCP interviewed with structured questionnaires.

**Results:** The participants' mean age was  $48.5 \pm 11.2$  years and 53.5% were female. Only 48.5% were Israel medical graduates and 72% were board-certified family physicians. Nearly 34% had been primary caregivers of family members. Most physicians (83.6%) were aware of the primary caregiver's high-risk for morbidity and mortality, and recommended preventive care. On a multivariate regression, PCP's higher level of risk awareness, their country of medical school and board certification were significant for explaining recommendations for preventive care. However, being a primary caregiver for a sick family member neither contributed significantly to the physicians' awareness to caregiving risks nor to their preventive care.

**Conclusion:** Although a high percentage of physicians were aware and concerned about caregivers' health, their preventive care activities were relatively passive. PCPs should take a more active and preventive role for maintaining caregivers' health.

**Keywords:** Caregivers; Elderly; Physicians; Preventive medicine; Primary health care.