

User-involvement in reablement: Ideal or reality?

While municipalities can implement reablement in different ways, a common aim is to promote independence for older people in their daily life. Reablement should emanate from a user's goals, and therapists and home care workers should together with the user identify and work toward a specific intervention outcome. User-involvement is consequently a key factor in reablement. Yet relatively few studies on how user-involvement is realized and experienced have been undertaken. One wonders if there are any dilemmas, unintended consequences or challenges linked to user-involvement in reablement. I have explored how user-involvement in the reablement context is experienced by users and healthcare professionals with a focus on the goal-setting process in particular.

The study I undertook had an explorative descriptive qualitative approach, and the context was an urban municipality with 70,000 inhabitants in south-eastern Norway where reablement had been implemented in home care services 1.5 years prior to the study. The data emanated from two sources. The first source was a sub-study that encompassed focus groups that included professionals recruited from home-care services in the municipality. Each focus group included nurses, nurse assistants, occupational therapists and physiotherapists. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the data. The second source was also a sub-study, which encompassed individual in-depth interviews with nine older adults participating in reablement. The interviews took place at the beginning, at the end, and six weeks after a reablement intervention. Thematic content analysis of the second sub-study is ongoing.

Findings

Transforming user-involvement from an ideal to reality is a demanding process, both for professionals and users. While user-involvement is a valued ideal that professionals strive toward in the goal-setting process, the users themselves appear to be less familiar with the reasoning underlying user-involvement and goal-setting. Professionals and users appear to have dissimilar experiences of the goal-setting process. Divergent understanding of what is valuable knowledge and insight affects both the professionals' and the users' self-expectations and their expectations of the other.

The professionals experienced that users' ability to commit to what user involvement "required" of users (e.g., expression of and taking responsibility for own wishes and goals for the intervention) differed, and users experienced this requirements challenging for several reasons.

The professionals employed two main strategies to enable user-involvement. One was spending sufficient time with users during the initial goal-setting stage. The other was starting an intervention by introducing small tasks that users could master, and postpone the goal-setting process. The users perceived that they benefited from such strategies. The professionals experienced that it could be tempting to complete a user's reablement intervention plan based on what they as professionals assumed the user wanted or had

indicated, despite viewing such as undesirable practice. Thus one can question who determines the goals in the goal-setting process and if there is too much emphasis on the importance of setting goals.