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Patients' relatives are ignored by the health system and suffer emotional stress

This release is available in [Spanish](#).

There are people who have traditionally been forgotten in the field of health. However, they are vitally important for patients' well-being: they are the family caregivers in hospitals. A study carried out at the [Department of Social Anthropology](#) of the University of Granada and led by lecturer Rafael Briones Gómez, shows that Spanish hospitals are not adapted to caregivers who look after their sick relatives, since most of them suffer from emotional stress during their stay in hospital.

The conclusion of this research work, which was led by doctor **Aurora Quero Rufián**, have been drawn from 45 interviews conducted with people who look after their relatives admitted to the Hospital Ruiz de Alda of Granada. Therefore, the researcher determined that family caregivers play an active role in hospital's daily life, in which they take part intensely. She has also established that the tasks they execute are extremely important for patients' health, as they are especially related to hygiene and feeding. Apart from this, she underlines watchfulness and company, as they are "personal support tasks that nobody but them can carry out".

Invisible people

Quero Rufián states that family caregivers "are invisible to the health system" within the hospital, in spite of the fact that "they are used as a resource and basic support for its structure". The study, carried out at the University of Granada, reveals that, although relatives lighten health professionals' workload, such as nurses and health assistants, the medical staff does not take family caregivers' "knowledge" into account while performing their work duties, i.e. treatment and care of sick people.

Thanks to the answers of the interviewees, the researcher determined that caregivers "have a pressing need to communicate and get in touch", considering the emotional stress they have to deal with because of the experience they must go through, and that frequently they get intimidated by the hospital framework. "Family caregivers do not want to be a bother in the hospital, and they have a sense of inferiority in an environment where any person wearing a white coat holds the leadership and the power", according to Aurora Quero.

Spanish hospitals are not properly adapted

The author of the study says that Spanish hospitals are not adapted to the stay of family caregivers, since they often lack the necessary facilities in order to put them up. She champions the creation of a protocol to regulate the relationships among caregivers, doctors, nurses and health assistants. Aurora Quero states that caregivers' self-esteem would get increased and so would the quality of the health system.

Quero Rufián suggests a reconsideration of the patient's role, which has always been thought of individually, although the patient is usually accompanied by a relative whose home is a long way away and for whom a stay in the hospital involves a very traumatic experience.

This doctoral thesis aims to contribute to take family caregivers in the hospital into account and improve their living conditions and the relationships with the medical staff in general, as this is an anthropological phenomenon which affects thousands of people, especially women, who have to stay in the hospitals every day and are seldom taken into account.

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