

The road less travelled: communication preferences of family members caring for Alzheimer's sufferers.

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The interactional theory of communication argues that meaning is created by the participants involved and that each communication is potentially different. For communication to be truly effective it needs to be conveyed to the receiver at the relevant time, with the right amount of detail and in an appropriate form or channel. When that communication contains information regarding medical matters and takes place across different providers, it becomes increasingly complex.

At present there is a growing awareness of the incidence of Alzheimer's disease and the implications of this for both families and New Zealand at large. Agencies are lobbying the Government for more money and for a strategy to deal with the potential numbers of sufferers.

This presentation describes the first stage of research into the communication between family members caring for people with Alzheimer's disease and the support

services available to assist them. It focuses on the communication preferences of the carers when accessing information and emotional support.

The research method involved in-depth interviews with people who were caring for or had cared for someone with Alzheimer's.

The main findings are that interviewees obtained most of their information from informal personal networks or support groups. They also felt that it was preferable to have one 'go to' person within the support services who could give information, if and when the carer needed or wanted it.