



**Care managers' perspective on their role in blended collaborative care among heart failure elderly multimorbid patients**

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**Abstract**

*Introduction:* Person-centered approaches based on Chronic Care Model incorporating mainly trained nurses as Care Managers (CMs) to coordinate treatment plans are widely acknowledged for their positive impact on patients' outcomes in different settings. The European ESCAPE project (Horizon 2020) introduced the Blended Collaborative Care (BCC) specifically to enhance quality of life of elderly heart failure (HF) patients with multimorbidity, including mental distress. Within the project, CMs play a pivotal role in implementing individual care plans by integrating patients' healthcare needs and preferences through a proactive, shared-decision approach. Also, CMs enhance patients' self-management and utilization of informal support services. Despite evident advantages, models involving CMs are still underutilized in Italy and across the EU, with their role poorly defined in the local healthcare policies. The current study aims to explore CMs' perception of their role and functions in a frame of ESCAPE BCC in Italy and Denmark.

*Method:* An exploratory, descriptive qualitative approach was utilised. CMs were recruited at Bellaria Hospital, Bologna, Italy and Odense University Hospital, Odense, Denmark. Semi-structured interviews were conducted between August 2023 and December 2024. Data were analysed using descriptive thematic analysis with an inductive approach and constructivist epistemology. All CMs were recruited and trained to perform care management in a frame of ESCAPE BCC.

*Results:* A total of 6 CMs were interviewed across Italy ( $N=4$ ) and Denmark ( $N=2$ ). The study findings highlight the unique role of the CM within the ESCAPE BCC intervention in supporting older HF multimorbid patients. A comprehensive understanding and clarification of the CM's responsibilities and functions, especially in chronic cardiac illnesses, are essential for their effective integration into local healthcare settings.

*Discussion:* The findings contribute to a deeper understanding and further effective implementation of CM figure in managing care for elderly multimorbid HF patients. Also it informs regarding potential initiatives in improving the management of complex treatment plans for this demographic. CM role