

Foreword

Books for mental health professionals are published every year, sometimes updating what is already known, sometimes rewording what we already know, but rarely providing something very new and important – what we don't know and what is important for us to know. This book by Gabriele Wilz, *Psychotherapeutic Support for Family Caregivers of People With Dementia*, is a welcome, important, indeed much needed and exciting, contribution to the field. And I feel privileged to be able to write its Foreword.

As any practicing therapist knows, people rarely change by simply telling them to do something different. Yet, the extent to which therapists intervene when working clinically with a caregiver – and I must confess that I am guilty of this myself – is telling them “It is important to take care of yourself.” What is needed beyond this simple behavioral suggestion is how to deal with the emotions – guilt, stress, apprehension, resentment, depression, anger – that might make it difficult for them to care for themselves. What therapists need is to help the caregiver learn, sometimes painstakingly so, how to develop a new and very difficult caregiver script, one that involves significant changes in their emotions, thinking, and behavior. This volume provides clinicians with clinical guidelines for helping caregivers adopt this new, complicated, and emotionally difficult script.

This volume describes how therapists can work clinically with patients or clients who are caring for a significant other who is suffering from dementia. Among the many difficulties associated with dementia are short-term memory loss, language problems, orientation difficulties, difficulty in caring for themselves, and impaired cognitive functioning. Depending on the severity of impairment, cognitively impaired individuals typically require the assistance of others to get through the day. Currently, it is estimated that over 50 million people in the world suffer from some form of dementia – most typically Alzheimer's disease. Moreover, this alarming statistic is likely to increase as individuals live longer.

Although medical research has been focusing on ways to better understand dementia, it has yet to come up with a cure or even an effective treatment. Knowledge of the psychological aspects of dementia similarly leave much

to be desired, and we are limited in our understanding of what therapists need to know and do to help caregivers cope with the task of helping loved ones. In short, there is a crying need for clinical guidelines to help therapists in working with caregivers, and this volume fills this much-needed void.

Caring for a cognitively impaired significant other is probably one of the most difficult experiences one is likely to encounter in one's lifetime. I say this not only from my work as a therapist, but also from personal experience. It is a totally new world, whereby the rules for day-to-day interactions with a loved one are likely to be different from anything one has experienced in the past. It can be unbelievably challenging emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally. Caregivers are likely to experience a myriad of emotions, such as stress, anger, guilt, depression, exasperation – just to mention a few. Cognitively, there is confusion – being at a loss in trying to understand what is happening to one's significant other along with confusion about what to do in day-to-day interactions. Behaviorally, a caregiver's own life is disrupted, and they find themselves having difficulty personally functioning as they had in the past. Without clinical guidelines for working with caregivers, therapists are likely to end up having their own emotional, cognitive, and behavioral difficulties professionally.

Psychotherapeutic Support for Family Caregivers of People With Dementia offers highly sophisticated clinical guidelines, describing everything a therapist needs to know in working with caregivers. It describes not only what to do and why to do it, but also the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional obstacles that can undermine therapeutic progress. Moreover, it contains several modules that can allow the practicing clinician to personalize the intervention to the specific needs of the patient.

In short, this is an invaluable volume that provides practicing therapists with clinically relevant and empirically grounded therapeutic guidelines for working with the ever-increasing number of caregivers who are confronted with the challenging task of caring for a loved one. In addition to offering helpful information about dementia, it also describes the burden put on caregivers and validates the very important role of support in their lives. The the-

rapy modules that can be tailored to the needs of the patient include guidelines on how to solve the numerous situational challenges one is likely to encounter in caring for a loved one; strategies for dealing with the wide range of emotions associated with caregiving; and ways to achieve the all-important goal of accepting those aspects of one's life circumstances that cannot be changed.

Not only is this clinically meaningful, but research evidence exists that it indeed makes a significant positive impact on the psychological and physical well-being of caregivers.

*Marvin R. Goldfried, PhD
Stony Brook University
New York, USA*