Informal caregiving: a conceptual framework
Alain Grand

The concept of informal caregiving is a social construction. It was designed by the professional sphere, and in reference to it, to describe the support given to the elderly by their family and social network. Focusing on help and care provision, it fails to envisage caregiving as the outcome of two processes:
. a relational history between the cared-for person and the caregiver,
. a differentiation process within the family and social network, leading to the designation of supporters and caregivers.
In this respect, the caregiver’s perception of caregiving and particularly his/her burden are not only related to the weight of the task but also (and mostly) to the conditions of its implementation and exercise. These conditions are themselves strongly linked to the quality of the negotiations conducted by the caregiver with the cared for person and with his/her own network. At the core of the negotiations lies the notion of tacit contract. According to the informal dynamic, the relationships established with the professional network will greatly vary. Thus the differences in care and services consumption and particularly the reluctance showed by certain families to have recourse to professionals can be explained. This must be taken into account when designing and implementing caregiver support programs and policies.