EFFECTIVENESS OF SUPPORTING INFORMAL CAREGivers OF PERSONS WITH DEMENTIA: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF RANDOMIZED AND NON-RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIALS

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OBJECTIVES
Dementia is known as a major public health problem affecting both patients and caregivers, and placing a high financial strain upon society. In community-dwelling patients, it is important to support informal caregivers in order to help them sustain their demanding role. Previous reviews about effectiveness of such supporting strategies often included a small number of studies, focused only on particular supportive types, particular outcomes or solely on caregivers. Therefore a general systematic review was conducted investigating effectiveness of different types of supportive strategies on at least well-being of the caregiver or the care-recipient.

RESULTS
Fifty-two papers met inclusion criteria. Although 87% of the interventions were to some extent effective, methods and findings were rather inconsistent.

Psychoeducational interventions generally lead to positive outcomes for caregivers, and delay permanent institutionalization of care-recipient.s. Cognitive behavioral therapy decreases dysfunctional thoughts among caregivers. Occupational therapy decreases behavioral problems among patients and improves self-efficacy of caregivers. In general, those interventions tailored on individual level generate better outcomes. Comparative research on respite care was very rare.

METHODS
A systematic literature search was conducted in Web of Science and PubMed. An adapted version of the Downs and Black (1998) checklist was used to assess methodological quality. A new classification was developed to group the different types of support for caregivers (figure 1).

CONCLUSION
Despite methodological inconsistency, supporting caregivers appears to be an effective strategy often improving well-being of caregiver or care-recipient and resulting in additional benefits for society. However, there is a need for more research on the (cost)-effectiveness of respite care.