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## Home care for older people with dementia where family caregivers were infected in the COVID-19 pandemic

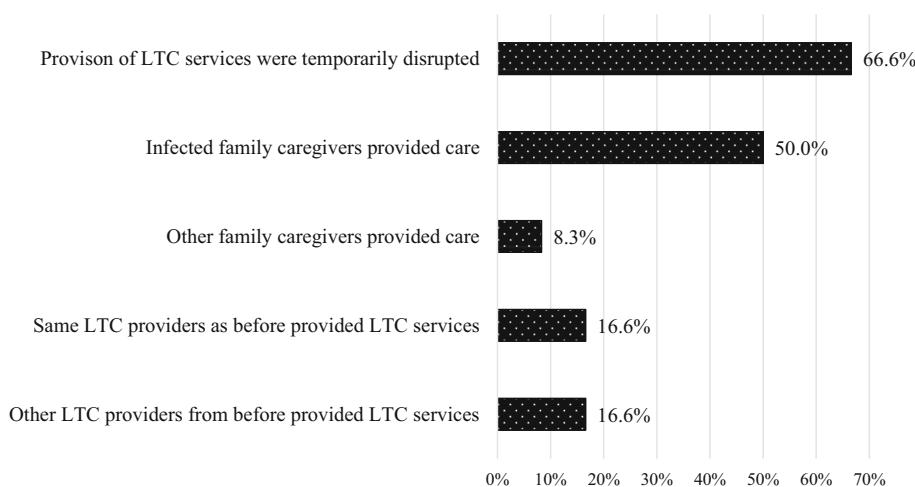
Dear Editor,

We are writing to draw the attention of geriatric care professionals to the increasing importance of family caregivers, particularly during the COVID-19 era. A family caregiver often assumes an important role in providing daily care for older people, even in countries such as Japan, where the long-term care (LTC) insurance system has long been established.<sup>1</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, the role of family caregivers as primary care providers has become increasingly critical. When the provision of LTC services is suddenly disrupted due to the spread of infection in the community or cluster, family caregivers take over the responsibility of providing care in many cases owing to the unavailability of healthcare services. However, when primary family caregivers are infected with COVID-19 while the dependent older adults are not, it may cause major concerns for older adults who are uncared for, particularly those with dementia.

To investigate such a situation comprehensively, an online survey was conducted from October to December 2021 among care managers who were members of the Japan Care Manager Association (JCMA) in cooperation with the COVID-19 task force of the Japan Geriatric Society. Care managers are in charge of the care planning and care coordination of older adults certified for LTC insurance.<sup>2</sup>

The online questionnaire focusing on the situation of persons with dementia (PWD) was distributed to care managers using the JCMA's mailing list and website. In total, 241 care managers from all over Japan participated in the survey. Sixteen (6.6%) care managers reported that family caregivers of PWD, but not the PWD, were infected by the coronavirus. Of these 16 care managers, 12 (75%) reported that PWD were treated as close contacts and four (25%) reported that PWD were not in close contact. These four care managers reported that PWD continued to receive their usual LTC either by LTC service providers or other family members, while their primary family caregivers were quarantined due to the COVID-19 infection. However, the 12 care managers who responded that PWD were treated as close contacts stated that the majority of PWD had difficulties in securing the provision of care (Fig. 1). Two-thirds of the participants reported that the provision of care was at least temporarily disrupted and LTC providers who were equipped to care for patients with COVID-19 or close contacts were not available. The results indicate that in half of the cases, infected family caregivers had no choice but to provide care for older adults, therefore, posing the risk of spreading the virus.

Although the current survey was limited by a small sample size, the implications of the findings are significant. First, geriatric care



**Figure 1** Provision of LTC when family caregivers are infected with COVID-19 and PWD are close contacts. LTC, long-term care; PWD, person with dementia.

professionals should thoroughly discuss care plans with older adults and their family members and prepare them for possible future infections. Comprehensive geriatric assessment, with particular attention to the situation of family caregivers, may provide a suitable opportunity to initiate such discussions. To help guide the discussion, a preparedness guide has been proposed in this study, which provides information on COVID-19 and action plans for PWD and caregivers.<sup>3</sup> Second, there is an urgent need to provide more support and resources to LTC providers for infection prevention and control and enable the availability of LTC services to patients with COVID-19 or close contacts. Temporary care facilities that can accommodate close contacts requiring daily care assistance may also be helpful. Third, there has been no research on the number of cases in which primary family caregivers are infected, while older adults are not, and the consequences of such a situation on patient health. A large-scale epidemiologic or retrospective study, is therefore, needed to elucidate the actual impact and severity of this issue.

As the role of family caregivers is becoming increasingly important, their infection with COVID-19 and isolation may endanger the provision of daily care to older adults. As such, the healthcare system should initiate robust plans to prevent further disruption of the LTC service provision during emergencies.

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## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

## Data availability statement

The datasets analyzed in the present study are not publicly available. Informed consent for the secondary use of the data was not obtained from the participants." cd\_value\_code="text

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