

Self-management: Redefining policy from the point of view of the elderly with cancer

A qualitative study of needs and wishes of older people with cancer

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leven met kanker

KWF KANKER BESTRIJDING

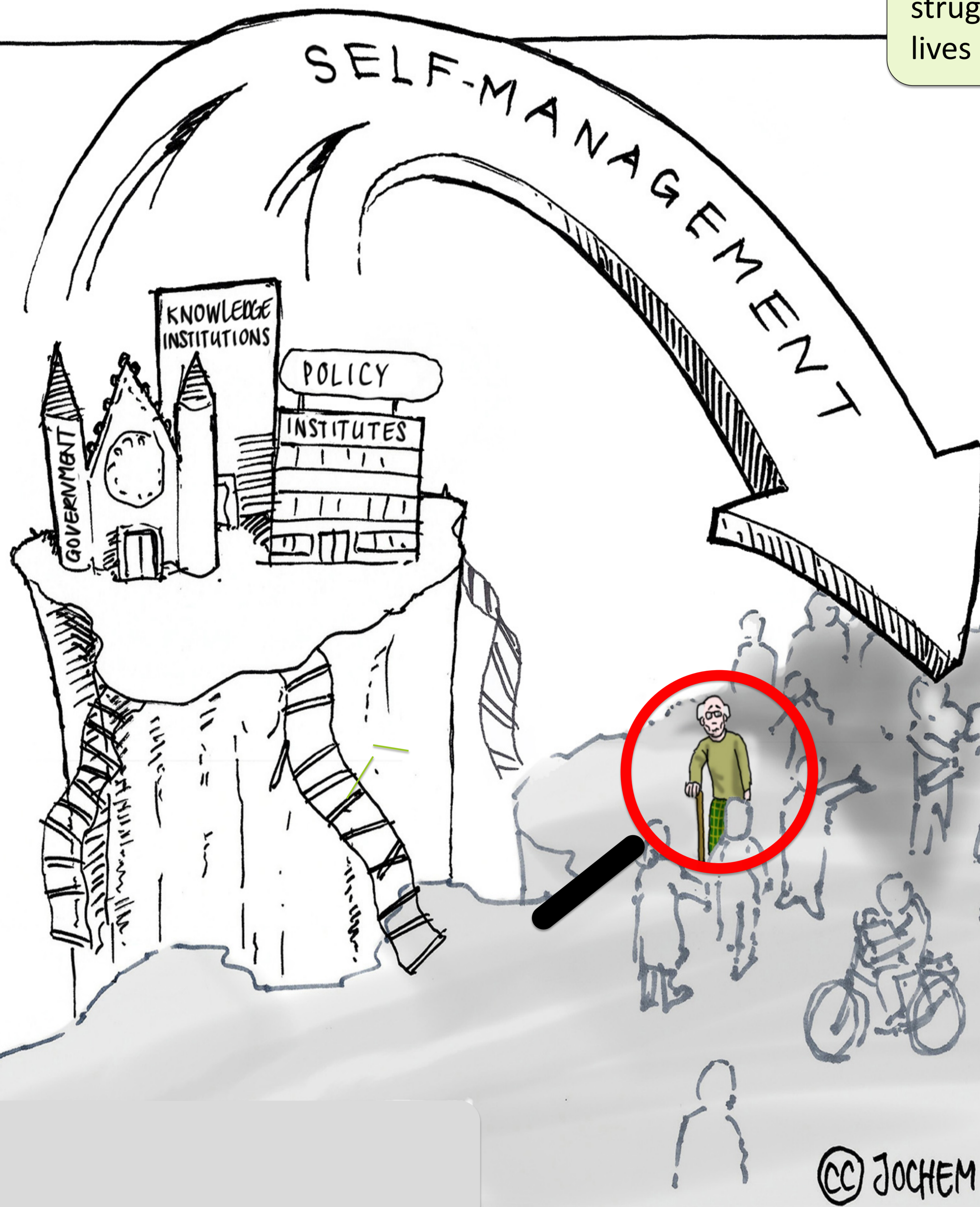
Introduction

Dutch healthcare policy is increasingly focused on self-management, motivated by cost-reduction and patient empowerment. Our project **aims** to describe the needs and wishes of the elderly with cancer concerning their self-management and to develop solutions that fit their needs.

Methods

Mixed method design: Interviews with elderly with cancer (n = 30), informal caregivers (n = 6), healthcare professionals, policy makers, formal support groups (n = 29), a questionnaire for elderly with cancer (n = 214) and several working sessions.

Results: "Mr. Klaassen and self-management"



Mr. Klaassen, 85 years, survived World War II and struggles with prostate cancer and skin cancer. He lives independently with his wife in a small village.

Mr Smith, how do you see self-management?

[uncertain] Um ... Self-management is new to me, so pretty abstract and I will have to learn it all, just like a computer program

[ashamed] Do you think it is something very different than what you're doing already?

[uncertain] Um... I don't think so, but I haven't thought about it.

[with increasing discomfort] Are you not already practicing self-management?!

[uncertain] I don't think so ... I haven't thought about it....

I think you do!

[reassured and proud] Maybe I am

What could self-management mean to you?

To me it means if I can continue to live independently. It's not the disease, but how I, as an older person, survive in this changing society.

Conclusions & Discussion

The discourse of **self-management** leads to confusion. *First* of all, the concept is abstract and presented as **something new**. Though not intended, the message that the elderly take home is: 'all by myself, without help.' *Second*, the elderly **attribute a different meaning** to self-management. For the elderly, it's not so much about managing their health but about how to survive in a changing society and about how to stay autonomous.

Policy is more effective if it starts from the lives and contextualized meaning of **the people involved**. In this case, Dutch policy aims to empower people but might result in disempowerment. The second part of this project is about co-creating the right bridges to empowerment that fit the needs of the elderly.