Anette Henriksson is a specialist cancer care nurse who has worked at the Palliative Care Unit at Dalens Hospital in Stockholm for almost 20 years. This unit is a specialist palliative care unit which consists of a home care section integrated with an inpatient ward. Anette conducted her doctoral studies at the School of Health and Medical Sciences, Örebro University and at the Health Care Sciences Postgraduate School, Karolinska University, and during this time she was also a member of the research group at the Department of Palliative Care Research, Ersta Sköndal University College.

Family members are central in providing care for patients with life-threatening illness, but they often experience a lack of necessary preparation and knowledge, and express a need for information and psychosocial support. This thesis therefore focused on a support group programme for family members of patients with life-threatening illness during ongoing palliative care. The overall aim was to investigate the participants’ experiences and the effects of the programme.

The main experiences of participation in the programme were a sense of belonging, a feeling of being confirmed, an insight into the gravity of the illness, and a moment of rest. Altogether, this resulted in a sense of safety. This sense of safety generated a feeling of being able to care for and to face the patient in a better and more assured manner than before. The family members who participated in the programme felt more capable of handling the caregiving situation, and also statistically significantly increased their perceived preparedness for caregiving, competence for caregiving, and feelings of rewards in relation to caregiving. They felt that the programme covered topics of interest, was structured in such a way as to make them feel invited by the caring team, and used an open approach that fostered a warm atmosphere.

These results should provide encouragement in the challenging and rewarding work of developing and delivering interventions with the explicit purpose of supporting family members during ongoing palliative care.