EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

Developing Gender-Specific, Web-Based Educational Modules for Caregivers of People with Alzheimer’s Disease

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For advanced practice nurses, attaining the doctor of nursing practice (DNP) degree is a transformational experience. The practitioner progresses from having an awareness and application of evidence-based practice (EBP) to contributing and disseminating findings of the DNP EBP capstone project. The following capstone project was completed in 2011 and received the first place DNP Student Poster Award at the Midwest Nursing Research Society conference.

Seventy percent of the 5.3 million Americans with Alzheimer’s disease (AD) live at home, where family caregivers provide long-term, complex care (Alzheimer’s Association, 2010). Evidence in the literature suggests that men and women differ in how they approach and are affected by the experience of caregiving. A caregiver assessment can identify key problems specific to men and women.

This EBP project, guided by Friedemann’s Framework of Systemic Organization (Friedemann, 1995; 2010) and organized by the Stetler Model of evidence-based practice (Melnyk & Fineout-Overholt, 2010), identified gender differences (incongruence) in problems reported by caregivers of persons with Alzheimer’s disease (AD) and developed gender-specific Web-based educational modules (WBEMs) to help caregivers cope with these problems.

Although there are multiple interventional caregiver support strategies reported in the literature (respite care, counseling, psychoeducation, support groups), education is among the proven strategies used to improve the quality of life for AD caregivers. In general, caregivers rate information needs over support needs (Wackerbarth & Johnson, 2002) and cite the Internet and healthcare professionals as their top resources for information (NAC/AARP, 2009).

Following an extensive review of the research literature and Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for caregiver assessment ($n = 10$) using a Web-based adaptation of the Carer’s Needs Assessment for Dementia (CNA-D) instrument (Wancata et al., 2005) the top two male and two female caregiver problems were identified for module development. The WBEMs developed for men were burden and strain and financial concerns. The WBEMs developed for women were communication and time for self.

Each module included (a) a topic introduction, (b) learning objectives and an expert presentation, (c) related Web links and printable materials, and (d) references.
modules were evaluated by a second group of caregiver volunteers \((n = 12)\), whose responses were overwhelmingly positive for design, content, and the “one-stop shopping” the modules provided. Gender-specific WBEMs are an efficient way to stabilize the internal system of a caregiver and the external system of the family and restore congruence in a caregiver situation.

The gender-specific WBEMs developed during this project can be combined with other strategies to form multicomponent interventions in the future. The four gender-specific modules that were developed focused on four caregiver problems. Additional gender-specific modules could be developed to address the 14 remaining caregiver problems included in the CNA-D instrument (Wancata et al., 2005). WBEMs have potential to provide caregiver support to hundreds of caregivers throughout the nation who access the Internet searching for problem solutions and support.

The WBEMs can be produced at a relatively low cost. Furthermore, the module template can be adapted to create WBEMs for caregivers of persons with other chronic illnesses. As leaders in healthcare, doctorate-prepared nurse practitioners have expertise to assess caregivers in the clinical setting, identify caregiver problems, and design innovative approaches to help caregivers provide competent home care. Gender specific WBEMs provide unique support to male and female caregivers and offer a cost effective, efficient, convenient strategy to deliver caregiver support in homes, the clinical settings, and communities.

**Tips for bedside nurses**

Caregivers of persons with AD are an integral component of the healthcare team. These caregivers are often burdened and need support. Rehabilitation nurses can optimize home care situations for AD caregivers using these steps during every encounter with persons with AD:

1. Identify and document the caregiver/s for each patient with AD.
2. Recognize that men and women approach caregiving differently.
3. Recognize that men and women are affected by caregiving differently.
4. Assess every caregiver for problems and needs related to their caregiver role.
5. Refer all caregivers of persons with AD to the local Alzheimer Association.

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**Acknowledgment**
The CNA-D instrument adaption to Web-based format was supported by the Rehabilitation Nursing Foundation, Association of Rehabilitation Nurses.

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References


