Abstract

Over 5 million people in the United States live with dementia. Often family caregivers do not seek outside help due to cost and time constraints. The purpose of this quasi-experimental study was to examine the experience of using a psychosocial assessment to understand caregivers’ needs, in the assessment’s visual format vs. face-to-face interview format versus a self-administered web-based format. This study integrates concepts from Friedemann’s framework of systemic organization that portrays a family as an open system striving for balance/congruence in their lives, impacting their health and well-being.

Methods

Assessment Tool

A psychosocial assessment tool, developed by Wancata et al. (2005), was used to identify and understand caregivers’ needs. The tool consisted of 10 closed and open-ended questions assessing the ease / time of completion. The tool was originally developed as a face-to-face interview. Ten family caregivers (5 males; 5 females) from one mid-sized state were randomized to focus on interview or web-based assessment. Participants in the interview group had the assessment administered by one nurse in a face-to-face format. Participants in the web-based group accessed the study’s website and completed the assessment online, which was then reviewed by a second nurse. Participants in both groups, as well as the nurses, completed a paper/pencil Survey to capture their perception of the assessment experience and demographic and situational data were analyzed. Overall, the caregivers stated the assessment was acceptable as an online or face-to-face interview, and it appeared to have no significant differences between the two groups.

Background

More than 5 million people in the United States are currently living with Alzheimer’s Disease (AD) (Alzheimer’s Association, 2011). Family caregivers provide the majority of care and experience tremendous physical and emotional consequences related to: personality and cognitive changes in their loved one, years of providing constant, loving attention, and demands of balancing, dressing, and other caregiving duties (NACGAW, 2006). Caregivers of persons with AD are less likely to seek outside help due to care and time constraints. A psychosocial assessment of caregivers’ needs is important for healthcare professionals to analyze caregivers needs, providing a means for planning appropriate interventions to promote balance/congruence in caregivers’ lives.

Friedemann’s Framework

“The four targets of control, spiritual, stability and growth interact with each other along the system periphery to form a dynamic equilibrium through which the healthy system continuously adjusts to find congruence” (Friedemann, 2011).

- Problems in caring and usual needs create imbalance and increase caregiver’s stress, impacting their health and well-being.
- Consequently, caregivers may develop a continuing struggle to keep the four targets balanced and be able to deal with each other and the environment.

Purpose

The purpose of this quasi-experimental study was to examine the experience of using a psychosocial assessment to understand caregivers’ needs, comparing a face-to-face interview format and a self-administered web-based format.

Results

Family Caregivers

- The interview group included 3 males / 2 females (2 African American; 3 White), in fair to good health, whose average age was 58 years with 14 years of schooling. They cared for a person with dementia at home for > 4 years and whose average age was 76 years.
- The web-based group included 3 males / 2 females (1 African American; 3 White), in fair to very good health, whose average age was 58 years with 14 years of schooling. They cared for a person with dementia at home for > 3 years and whose average age was 73 years.
- Participants in the interview group:
  - rated the assessment as excellent or good.
  - reported it was easy to complete.
  - thought that all caregivers should have access to such an assessment.
- The participants in the web-based group reported greater frequency that:
  - there were questions to ask.
  - the understanding of their needs or situation was impacted by completing the assessment.
- Despite differences in response frequencies, no statistically significant differences (p > .05) were found between the two groups based on analyses appropriate for small sample sizes.
- Comments included:
  - “Wishes questions on where you stand to seek more help.”
  - “I didn’t realize how much of my day revolves around my dad.”

Table 1. Frequency of Responses on Caregiver Post-Assessment Survey

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