

A Program to Improve the Quality of Life of Caregivers of Older Adults With Chronic Conditions: A Pilot Study

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PURPOSE: There are roughly 41.8 million unpaid caregivers of older adults in the United States (National Alliance for Caregiving & AARP, 2020), with 36% reporting high levels of stress. (Talley & Crews, 2007). Caregivers report more information, education, and training is needed to feel competent (Bell et al., 2019). Many programs focus on the needs of dementia caregivers, but few address the needs of those caring for individuals with chronic health conditions.

DESIGN: A pilot study of a care coordination program, using a mixed-methods design, was conducted with eight participants, aged 18 years and older living with and caring for an older adult with a chronic health condition, recruited from community partner agencies.

METHOD: A needs assessment included information from the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (Toomey et al., 1995), a home assessment, and a caregiver completed Adult Carer Quality of Life Questionnaire (AC-QoL) (Negri et al., 2019). Caregivers received a care plan with information on community resources, needed education, and home modification recommendations. Post program, the AC-QoL and individual interviews were completed.

RESULTS: Quality of life improved for 6 of 8 AC-QoL subscales and decreased for caring stress and choice. In interviews, caregivers reported reduced stress and improved self-efficacy, and benefits to having an outside perspective, a support system, and needed information. In a larger study, a sample size of 20 would be needed, additional caregiver information provided, and an additional assessment of caregiver stress used.

CONCLUSION: Consistent with the literature, caregiver quality of life was improved (Terracciano et al., 2020), and needed information provided (Bell et al., 2019). With an ecological lens and expertise in assessing the individual, their tasks and environment, occupational therapists are ideally suited to provide programs that optimize the function and well-being of the caregiving dyad.

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