Developing a Complex Intervention Program for Informal Caregivers of Stroke Survivors

Theresia Krieger

T Krieger1, J Jungbauer1, F Feron2, E Dorant2

1Catholic University of Applied Sciences North-Rhine Westphalia, Aachen, Germany
Background
Stroke is a leading cause of long-term disability, affecting the entire family system. Overload and unmet caregiver needs lead to physical and mental overburdening with negative long term health consequences. Stroke caregivers may benefit from professional support. In Germany, no complex prevention programs to support caregivers of stroke survivors have been developed yet. The aim of the study is to build a new preventive support program for stroke caregivers in Germany, using a mixed-method approach.

Methods
Three separate, but interconnected, interpretative and inductive qualitative studies were conducted. Regional stroke units, rehabilitation centres, outpatient services and the home environment of caregivers of stroke survivors were included. Essential components of caregiver support were identified 1) by interviewing experienced stroke caregivers and 2) health professionals working with caregivers, and 3) by participant observation of caregiver - health professional interactions. By using content analysis first the qualitative data were condensed into themes and second themes were arranged into conceptual program building blocks.

Results
The need for a personalized, holistic and multicomponent caregiver support program emerged from all three studies. Fourteen main themes were found, including problem solving, coping, resource activation as well as information brokerage. Informal stroke caregivers will be approached via outreach counselling as early as possible in the acute stroke phase. Focus person support, individual face-to-face communication and client participation in the rehabilitation process are important program components.

Conclusions
The personalized multicomponent support program was designed utilizing a mixed-methods approach. This program will offer maximum flexibility and consist of five conceptual building blocks: content, human resources, personalized approach, timing and setting.

Key message
- Using a mixed methods approach was valuable to develop a complex stroke caregiver intervention program. Important conceptual building blocks were clarified before program implementation