Caring for the stroke caregiver: An effective three-fold peer support group model

Ana Gollega, MSc., BSc. OT (c), Sarah Vanderveen, MSc, R.Psych., Geraldine Venegas, MSW, RSW.

Background

Persisting neuropsychiatric symptoms readily experienced in stroke survivors will present as a significant barrier for rehabilitation outcomes and eventual home-life and community reintegration (Anderson, Linto and Stewart-Wynne, 1995). Improving emotional adjustment and providing adequate supports, including mitigation of caregiver burnout can contribute to better long-term outcomes following stroke (Ayerbe, Ayis, Wolfe and Rudd, 2013; Ellis, Grubbaugh and Egede, 2012). Review of resources for stroke caregivers’ suggests a paucity of opportunities for informational exchange and peer support (Krieger, Feron, and Dorant, 2017; Bakas et al., 2014).

As such, we sought to bolster the Association for the Rehabilitation of the Brain Injured (ARBI) participants’ rehabilitation by shoring up their caregivers.

ARBI’s Caregiver Support Group (CSG) has been meeting for three consecutive years. Information and discussion around uniquely varied, relevant, and participant-ranked topics, have included (but not limited to) ambiguous loss, disability-friendly travel, financial and legal issues, and community-based activities and resources.

The aim of the group was three-fold:

- Psycho-education
- Skill building strategies
- Peer interaction and support

Results

The total number of caregiving families served in CSG group sessions was 33. Overall, 90% of participants “Agreed” or “Strongly Agreed” that the CSG content and resources offered were helpful (N=130).

In an annual closing survey, the majority caregiver families (N=26) “Agreed” or “Strongly Agreed” that the CSG resources and content:

1) Helped them better understand the stressors associated with caregiving.
2) Was helpful or the management of their caregiving responsibilities (regardless of the numbers of years).

Conclusions and Considerations

Supporting ARBI caregivers contributed to reports of feeling further equipped to manage in a caregiving role, possibly also impacting the trajectory of stroke recovery for their survivors. Further investigation into the efficacy of long versus short term caregiver support, and the evolution of caregivers’ needs over the continuum of stroke rehabilitation and recovery is needed (i.e., one versus three years post-stroke).

Caregiver Feedback

“I enjoyed the presentation, the resources shared and explanations of the stages that we go through as caregivers. And understanding that we are not alone in our challenges.”

“The group sharing is very helpful and can be emotionally healing.”

“Loved them - would be beneficial to all families who have been affected by a loved one who has a brain injury.”

References


www.arbi.ca @arbi_ca