The Impact of a Yearlong, Web-Based Caregiver Intervention on Health Care Service Use for Persons with Stroke

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ABSTRACT
More than 5 million American adults live with long-term impairments attributed to stroke. Caregivers are provided immediate and ongoing support and education to help families manage the care of persons with stroke. Considering the impact of the intervention on the caregivers' well-being, this study examined the effect of the intervention on the caregivers' well-being.

METHODS
- Using a rolling enrollment, adult caregivers were recruited between May 2002 and December 2004 and randomized to the Web or non-Web users group.
- Trained interviewers telephoned subjects every other week to ask about health care service use for the person with stroke, as well as well-being of the caregiver.
- The interview data were immediately entered into web-based forms and downloaded into SPSS for analysis.

RESULTS
- The Web users group reported fewer numbers of: healthcare provider visits, hospitalizations, and emergency room visits.
- Less people with stroke from the Web users group were placed in nursing homes and were placed later.

RESULTS (cont)
- Based on a Mann-Whitney U test, significant differences were found between the groups in hospital readmissions and emergency room visits.

BACKGROUND
- Stroke is one of the most common medical events in the United States.
- Nearly 68% of these persons with stroke require care at home by family members.
- The National Institutes of Health point to a need for research using innovative technology to support family caregivers.

SAMPLE
- 73 subjects from northern Ohio and southern Michigan completed the yearlong study.

Tip of the Month: customized educational information on topics such as nutrition. Ask the Nurse: a forum to ask the nurse specialist and rehabilitation team any questions or discuss issues related to caring. CaringTalk: a non-structured, asynchronous email discussion group that connects the caregiver with other participants and the nurse specialist. Educational Links: information about stroke, caring, and caregivers from reliable, linked web sites.

RESULTS
- $8000 based on average charges for an emergency room visit in the midwest.
- $600,000 based on average changes for a hospital stay in the U.S.
- The effect of the intervention on the caregivers' well-being was also analyzed.

CONCLUSION
- Too often family caregivers are ignored in the management of stroke, however, they are critical to successful home caring.
- Caregivers should be given tools (e.g. web-based intervention) to enhance their competence and self-efficacy.
- CaringWeb could be exported to multiple geographic sites (e.g. rural, underserved) or adapted to other chronic conditions where caregivers control the health care decisions of care recipients.

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