

Need for Empowering the Caregivers of the Elderly through Educational Intervention and Counselling

Meha Mathur^{1*}, Dr. Meenakshi Mathur²

ABSTRACT

Care givers are the one who takes care of the elderly suffering from chronic illness or disease managing their medications, helping to bathe or dress. For a care giver it is important to have complete knowledge and skills of care giving so that they can provide proper care giving to the elderly. A study was conducted on the care givers of elderly patient. During the survey 40 care givers were observed. In the study we found that educational intervention and counselling is required for care givers on the following aspects such as self care, nursing care, fall prevention, physiotherapy and nutritional care.

Keywords: Care Givers, Elderly, Educational- Intervention, Counselling

Empowering means to increase the social, economic, political and legal strength and ability of an individual. To give them equal rights, status and opportunity in all the aspects of life and to live freely with respect and dignity. To have complete control on their life and make their own decisions and choices. To have rights to get their voices heard.

Need for Empowerment

The need for empowerment is common for each individual in the society. They are:

- To freely live their life with a sense of self-worth, respect and dignity
- To have complete control of their life, both within and outside of their home and workplace.
- To make their own choices and decisions
- To have equal rights to participate in social, religious and public activities
- To have equal social status in the society
- To have equal rights for social and economic justice
- To determine financial and economic choices
- To get equal opportunity for education
- To get equal employment opportunity without any gender bias
- To get safe and comfortable working environment (1)

¹ Research Associate, Asian Centre for Medical Education Research & Innovation (ACMERI) Jodhpur, Raj., India

² Prof. & Head, Dept. of Home Science, J. N. Vyas University, Jodhpur, Raj., India

*Responding Author

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As we talk about empowerment we do not only mean empowerment of educated, working and earning people but it also includes empowerment of those also who are uneducated, unemployed, non-earning, underprivileged and most importantly the one who is staying at home doing multiple tasks like doing household work, taking care of children, managing the social responsibilities, following traditions and rituals and also taking care of elderly members of the family. The one who is unpaid and takes care of the elderly at home are the care givers who needs to be trained and educated, their empowerment through educational intervention is must irrespective of their socio- economic status, educational background, gender etc.

Wikipedia has described “A **caregiver or career** is an unpaid or paid person who helps another individual with impairment with his or her activities of daily living. Any person with health impairment might use caregiving services to address their difficulties. Caregiving is most commonly used to address impairments related to old age, disability, a disease, or a mental disorder. Typical duties of a caregiver might include taking care of someone who has a chronic illness or disease; managing medications or talking to doctors and nurses on someone's behalf; helping to bathe or dress someone who is frail or disabled; or taking care of household chores, meals, or bills for someone who cannot do these things alone. With an increasingly aging population in all developed societies, the role of caregiver has been increasingly recognized as an important one, both functionally and economically. Many organizations which provide support for persons with disabilities have developed various forms of support for careers as well.”

Besides the general need of empowerment there are some additional needs for the care givers of the elderly patients at home

- To get rid of their isolation
- To overcome the feeling for being neglected
- To conquer the fear of under care and death of elderly
- To rise above the boredom and monotonous routine.

The Challenges and Problems of Caregivers

The more challenging the patients' needs, the more complex, demanding, and stressful the caregiver's role might be. Stress may be constant as caregivers must flex and adjust to sudden changes and abnormal situations to accommodate their patients' needs. Care giving can often be undervalued by those who have never served in that role. Caregivers need to have a lot of patience and stamina; and knowledge of health-care terms, medical conditions, and medications, because they often need to work through family situations, crises, and life-threatening events related to their family members. (2)

Problems faced by the caregivers of elderly are:(3), (4)

- Anxiety
- Neglect
- Stomach and digestive problems
- Weight gain or loss

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- Burnout
- Mood swings
- Irritability
- Depression
- Self-neglect
- Chronic stress
- Family conflicts
- Excessive alcohol or drug use
- Premature institutionalization of the patient
- Failure to meet their own emotional and personal needs
- Disturbed sleep
- Back, shoulder or neck pain
- Headaches
- Loss of hair
- Fatigue
- High blood pressure, irregular heartbeat, palpitations
- Chest pain
- Perspiration
- Skin disorders
- Periodontal disease, jaw pain
- Reproductive problems or infertility
- Weakened immune system suppression
- Sexual dysfunction or lack of libido
- Memory problems

The care givers of the elderly are facing the above mentioned problems. If these problems persist for longer time it is injurious for the health of care giver and the family as a whole.

According to Gorman (1999) "The ageing process is of course a biological reality which has its own dynamic, largely beyond human control. However, it is also subject to the constructions by which each society makes sense of old age. In the developed world, chronological time plays a paramount role. The age of 60 or 65, roughly equivalent to retirement ages in most developed countries, is said to be the beginning of old age. In many parts of the developing world, chronological time has little or no importance in the meaning of old age. Other socially constructed meanings of age are more significant such as the roles assigned to older people; in some cases it is the loss of roles accompanying physical decline which is significant in defining old age. Thus, in contrast to the chronological milestones which mark life stages in the developed world, old age in many developing countries is seen to begin at the point when active contribution is no longer possible." (5)

Educational intervention is a methodology to modify the physical, intellectual and moral development of the individual through the process of training, counselling, workshop, or introduction of new project, curriculum etc.

Counselling is the process that occurs when a client and counsellor set aside time in order to explore difficulties which may include the stressful or emotional feelings of the client. It includes the act of helping the client to see things more clearly, possibly from a different view-point. This can enable the client to focus on feelings, experiences or behavior, with a goal to facilitating positive change. It is a relationship of trust and confidentiality. (6)

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Pilot study on Educational Intervention and Counselling for Care givers of Elderly

A need based study was conducted to understand the problems of care givers of the elderly patients suffering from strokes. During the survey 40 families were visited who had elderly patients at their home. Prior written consent was taken from them. Out of 40 care givers 27 were female and 13 were male. The average age ranges of the care givers were between 24 to 86 years. The types of problems reported were varied and numbers of problems reported were also varied ranging from 1-3 to 7-10. The major problems reported by the female care givers were knee- pain, back pain, joint pain, headache, lack of sleep, acidity, cervical spondylitis, no self-care, socially inactive, improper energy management, improper time management, over burdened, frustration, depression, improper eating timings and habits and hygiene negligence. On the basis of above study it was observed that educational intervention and counselling for the care givers were required. A module was prepared to provide knowledge and counseling to the care givers. This model was prepared after discussions from team of physiotherapist, doctors, nurses, old age home staff, counselors, dietitians and nutritionist In this module aspect covered were self care, nursing care, fall prevention, nutritional care and physiotherapy. The module prepared covers the following:

Self-Care:

Caring for yourself is one of the most important—and one of the most often forgotten—things you can do as a caregiver. When your needs are taken care of, the person you care for will benefit too. The care giver needs to take care of his

- Nutritive meals on proper time
- Personal hygiene
- Proper medication (if any)
- Proper exercise
- Sound sleep for 8 hours
- Sharing of responsibilities
- Managing social pressure
- Avoid neglecting self needs and requirements.
- Proper time management
- Proper energy management

Nursing Care

Nursing care is very important aspect of care giving especially for the bed ridden patients, they need assistance in bathing, dressing and body care. A proper nursing care will help the elderly to be more healthy and comfortable.

- Oral care
- Bathing
- Nail care
- Skin care

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- Hair care
- Cloths care
- Bedding care
- Bedsore care (if any)
- Utensil care
- Hygienic maintenance of living area
- Assistive device care
- Bowl and bladder care
- Bed –pan, urinal and catheter care

Fall Prevention:

According to the researches it is observed the fall is the major cause of the injury among the people age 60 and above. Falls are the number one causes of injury, hospital visits due to trauma and death. There are many different factors that can increase the risk of falling. To prevent the fall following points should be kept in mind. (7)

- Use of walking devices
- Use of railings and bars
- Room should be spacious
- Room should be obstacle free
- Non slippery floor
- Non slippery footwear's
- Eyesight check

Physiotherapy:

The benefits of physiotherapy for seniors include restoring and maintaining mobility, balance, and a level of physical activity. Physiotherapy may be the secret to sustaining a completely independent lifestyle at home. Research indicates that the ability to maintain physical function also improves overall health by enhancing psychological and social well-being. The longer individuals maintain a physically active lifestyle, the longer they enjoy a healthy life of independence. (8)

- Active upper limb exercises
- Active lower limb exercises
- Passive upper limb exercises
- Passive lower limb exercises
- Balancing exercises

Nutrition

A healthy diet with vital nutrients can help ward off potential. Health problems that are common with advancing age like constipation, heart problems, diabetes, high blood pressure, increase

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cholesterol level can be controlled through dietary modification. Nutritional diet will also help to maintain a healthy life.

- Water intake
- Timing of food
- Number of meals
- Interval between the meals
- Consumption of salt, sugar and spices
- Consumption of fats, oil and ghee
- Consumption of milk and milk products
- Consumption of Fruits and vegetables
- Consumption of alcohol and tobacco
- Form of food- solid/ semi- solid/ liquid

The module is prepared and now it can be implemented on the care givers of the elderly patients.

CONCLUSION

On an airplane, an oxygen mask descends in front of you. What do you do? As we all know, the first rule is to put on your own oxygen mask before you assist anyone else. Only when we first help ourselves can we effectively help others. Caring for yourself is one of the most important—and one of the most often forgotten—things you can do as a caregiver.(9) When your needs are taken care of, the person you care for will benefit too. It is very important to for the care givers of the elderly to be aware of the best care giving practices for the elderly patients at home. In our pilot study conducted on the 40 families of care givers who have elderly patients at home, we observed the need to educate them on the following aspects such as self care, nursing care, fall prevention, physiotherapy, and nutrition care. The study conducted was on care giver of the elderly patients but the comprehensive module prepared is suitable for care givers of elderly, suffering from general as well as acute health problems.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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