



Importance of Caregiver Education/Sensitisation for Persons with Dementia

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Introduction

Dementia is a progress neuro-degenerative condition. Though the condition starts with mild symptoms concerning the cognitive skills of the individual, it may soon widespread to all the activities of a given individual affected by it and interrupts the activities of daily living of these individuals [1]. According to World Alzheimer's Report, it is estimated that around 4.1 Millions of individuals are affected by it in India alone and the alarming fact is that the prevalence rate has shown a rapid increase over the years and these numbers are expected to increase over the years.

The age of occurrence of dementia is roughly around 5th to 7th decade of life, however it is noteworthy that young onset dementia also has been reported in exceptional cases. These individuals usually live at their homes or old age homes. These individuals are usually accompanied with a caregiver, usually their spouse, daughters or son. This may vary from case to case basis and no generalised statement can be drawn in this regard. Dementia not only affects the person who is affected by it but also imposes constraint on these caregivers [2]. The challenges confronted by caregivers can extend to economic, social, psychological and physical domains and the other fact which is to be considered here is the socio-economic status of these individuals [3,4].

It becomes important to sensitise the caregivers of persons with Dementia as the affected people would require at most care for many years and the condition is often irreversible, only when it is associated with conditions like vascular it may be reinstated. Hence caregiver sensitisation becomes important [5-7]. As soon as a person is diagnosed to have

dementia or even Mild Cognitive Impairment (a precursor to Dementia), the concerned health care professional has to intervene and counsel the caregivers.

The caregiver sensitisation is directly proportional to the awareness and knowledge of the caregivers towards dementia, a study carried out in Indian context [8]. This study considered a total of 50 immediate caregivers of persons with Dementia and the findings of the study showed that individuals had reasonable good knowledge about the caregivers. This fact is dependent on the educational status of the caregivers. However, their attitudes towards dementia tend to be less positive. These findings emphasise on assessing both knowledge and attitudes among dementia caregivers explicitly and not generalising one parameter based on the other (i.e. assuming that attitude will be positive if knowledge is good and the visa-versa).

Community Education and Individual education was started in the western countries to minimise the burden on the caregivers. Community Education refers to the process of sensitising the caregivers in a group and group counselling session may be undertaken to alleviate the stress confronted by caregivers. While Individual education refers to the process of considering individuals on case to case basis and the advantage of Individual education is the problems confronted by caregivers can be individualistic and be counselled in depth. These kinds of studies are carried out in Western context and are found to be beneficial. To cite, a western study carried out in 2015 [9] on a total of 764 individuals showed that educational programs reduced the caregiver burden and depression to a moderate extent. According to recent study [10], communication training

programs can help both caregivers and dementia patients by enhancing stress levels, quality of life, and communication. The purpose of this study was to assess the quality of program designed to reduce the caregiver training and the findings of this study showed that the structured programs can have maximum impact to the caregivers. It is note-worthy that all the cited studies are in Western context and there is a need to carry out such studies in Indian context.

Conclusion

Caregiver education at Individual level or community level is the need of the hour considering studies showing burden and depression on caregivers, to reduce the emotional burden, it becomes extremely important to design programs and alleviate the problems associated with caregiver burden.

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