

Health Care Professionals' Education About Family Caregiving Consultation Results and Planning for Action



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The Need for Health Care Professionals' Education About Family Caregiving

The need for education for health care professionals about family/friend caregiving is undeniable due to the expanding complexity and prevalence of family/friend caregiving. Demographic changes, changes within the structure of the health care system, and the move towards family-centred care contribute to the urgency to educate our current and future health care professionals about the reality of family/friend caregiving. There is a need to broaden health care professionals' understanding about the important role of family/friend caregivers, as many view caregivers only in relation to care of their clients.

"... health care professionals are the link/bridge between the family and the health care system as a whole and that link is only as strong as the relationship between the provider and the family, that is based on mutual respect and understanding of each other's role." - Advocacy Group

More than 75% of care to older Canadians is provided by a family or friend caregiver, almost half of whom are providing care to more than one person. Family/friend caregivers provide millions of hours of unpaid care per year; an economic contribution of more than 25 billion dollars. Often, these caregivers serve as the primary support and advocate for older adults as they navigate the health care system.



Ensuring that health care professionals and family caregivers have a respect for and understanding of each other's roles will optimize outcomes for older adults, and improve the experience of care for both the health care professionals and caregivers.

Currently, health care professionals receive little, if any, education about family/friend caregiving as part of their training. As part of a larger study on family caregiving, representatives from the education and health sectors were interviewed about the need for education about family/friend caregiving for health care professionals. This brochure provides an overview of their responses regarding: the need for caregiver-related education, the desired outcomes of caregiver-related education, and consideration for the creation and implementation of learning opportunities. The findings from the interviews have been grouped to inform potential actions of four stakeholder groups.

1. Advocacy Groups (voluntary sector)
2. Educators (post-secondary)
3. Professional Associations
4. Public Policy Makers

All stakeholders interviewed agreed that there was a strong need for education about family/friend caregiving for health care professionals.

Educational opportunities for health care professionals can take many forms (e.g., health care professional training, continuing education). The information to support the development of curriculum exists, and can be used to create core content which could be tailored to the needs of specific disciplines.

Core Content Areas:

- * Experiences of caregivers in varied situations (e.g., dementia);
- * Family dynamics;
- * Impact/consequences of caregiving;
- * Communication and assessment skills; and
- * Awareness of supports and resources.

A Plan for Action - Advocacy Groups

To support the implementation of education about family/friend caregiving for health care professionals, Advocacy Groups can:

-  Raise awareness about the importance of family/friend caregivers within our health care system through community-based education (websites, support groups, workshops, etc.).

“The family are giving care and they have been doing it day in and day out for many months or years and yet the health care providers don’t see the contribution they have made to the care and quality of life to the patient, and they don’t see the impact it has had on their own health and lives.”
- Advocacy Group



-  Collaborate with researchers to build the evidence needed by decision makers to recognize the value of supporting caregivers.
-  Collaborate with researchers to disseminate research findings to stakeholders.
-  Work with Professional Associations and Educators to develop education about family/friend caregiving for health care professionals, including the availability of supports and resources for caregivers.
-  Educate the public about the complex issues faced by family/friend caregivers, highlighting challenges that might exist in the caregiver-health care professional relationship.
-  Lobby government to have family caregiver-related education identified as a priority for health care professionals.

A Plan for Action - Educators

To support the implementation of education about family/friend caregiving for health care professionals, Educators can:



Add content about family/friend caregivers into existing curriculum for health care professionals.



Incorporate language into existing curriculum that recognizes and supports the inclusion of family/friend caregivers as a part of the health care team and that care of the client includes support for the caregiver.

"I do think it is essential that we care for individuals holistically, which includes the families... we should all be educated to be able to assess and communicate with families."

- Educator



Promote the need for specific family caregiver-related education for health care professionals within respective departments and more broadly within faculty of health professions.



Host forums within respective departments or faculty to enable opportunities to hear about the latest research on family/friend caregiving.



Collaborate with organizations who represent caregivers or who have expertise in caregiver issues to develop a module on caregivers for health care professionals.



Work with Professional Associations and employers to develop continuing education opportunities for practicing health professionals.

A Plan for Action - Professional Associations

To support the implementation of education about family/friend caregiving for health care professionals, Professional Associations can:



Raise awareness about the importance of family/friend caregivers within the health care system through existing mechanisms (e.g., website, newsletter, education days, conferences).



Offer professional development opportunities on family/friend caregivers.



Promote the need for education about family/friend caregiving as part of curriculum standards for health care professionals.



Offer incentives and support for members to attend educational opportunities that focus on family/friend caregiving.



Collaborate with Educators and Advocacy Groups to develop education modules for health care professionals.

It is important to recognize the value of psycho-social care for family/friend caregivers as part of all health care professionals' practice.

A Plan for Action - Public Policy Makers

To support the implementation of education about family/friend caregiving for health care professionals, Public Policy Makers can:



Work with other stakeholder groups to establish family caregiver-related education for health care professionals as a priority issue.



Ensure that sufficient funding is provided to educational institutions and Professional Associations to support the implementation of education about family/friend caregiving for health care professionals.



The Big Picture

The motivation for providing education for health care professionals about family/friend caregiving may vary between stakeholder groups (client outcomes vs. caregiver outcomes), but given the important role of family and friend caregivers in the health care system, the need exists for this type of education.

Collaboration amongst stakeholders will be required to bring family caregiver-related education for health professionals from the idea phase to the implementation phase.

“Champions” within each of the stakeholder groups will be essential.

“Having staff as champions, developing, advocating, keeping the issue at the forefront and they can help pass the education onto others. They will need ongoing support to change practice, but I think having them as champions is a big factor to get it implemented and rolled out.” - Professional Association

The Team

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The Research

This research is a component of the project, “Does Timing of Caregiver Assessment Make a Difference: Evaluating the Impact with Older Spousal Caregivers of Persons with Cognitive Impairment” (2009-2013).



From Left: Pamela Fancey, Janice Keefe, Nancy Guberman, Catherine Ward-Griffin

As well as garnering input from key stakeholders in the area of caregiver-related education, this project examined the impact of caregiver assessment (The C.A.R.E. Tool) with older spousal caregivers of persons with dementia, and the learning experiences of the nurse trainees who conducted the assessments. We would like to thank the individuals who contributed to this component of the research.

More Information

For more information on our work related to caregivers and caregiver assessment, visit our website:

www.msvu.ca/nsca/caregiverassessment or contact us at:

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