Informal Caregiving Priorities and Barriers in a Rural and Remote State

Andrea E. Slosser, Morgan E. Longstreth, Kathryn A. Richardson, Robin A. Barry, Catherine P. Carrico, & Christine L. McKibbin

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1. INTRODUCTION

- Individuals with chronic illness or disability may require care that extends beyond paid health services. Often, this care is provided by family and friends (i.e., informal caregivers).
- Informal caregivers may struggle to identify and access supportive resources for themselves and their care recipients, especially in rural and remote communities.
- Understanding the unique needs and barriers experienced by informal caregivers in rural and remote communities is essential for addressing service gaps in these areas.

2. OBJECTIVES

- To characterize areas of need among informal caregivers statewide.
- To understand barriers to providing informal care and to improving the quality of life among older adults in Wyoming from the perspective of informal caregivers.

3. METHODS

Recruitment
- Participants were recruited from attendees of the 2018 Wyoming Conference on Aging who self-identified as informal caregivers.

Materials & Instruments
- Participants received a paper-and-pencil Needs Assessment Survey.
- Participants rated their interest in a variety of geriatric educational topics (1 = "none" to 4 = "strong") and responded to open-ended questions about barriers.

Analysis
- Descriptive statistics were calculated using SPSS version 24 and were used to characterize participants and interest in geriatric topics.
- Thematic analysis was used to identify themes among barriers to providing informal care and barriers to improving the quality of life for older adults in Wyoming.

4. RESULTS

Participant Characteristics
- Self-identified informal caregivers residing in Wyoming (n = 16).
- Provided informal care to individuals with Alzheimer’s disease or other dementia (n = 3, 18.8%), chronic illness (n = 8, 50.0%), or both (n = 5, 31.2%).

Interest in Geriatric Education Topics
- Anxiety and depression (M = 3.5, SD = 0.7), Alzheimer’s disease and dementia (M = 3.3, SD = 0.8), and community resources (M = 3.3, SD = 0.8) emerged as areas of greatest interest (see Figure 1).

Informal Caregiving Barriers
- The following emerged as themes among barriers to providing informal care: availability of resources, cost of resources, access to resources, rural-specific barriers, knowledge about caregiving and related services, and mental health concerns.

Improving Quality of Life Barriers
- The following emerged as themes among barriers to improving the quality of life for older adults in Wyoming: availability of caregiver support services, access to services, cost of services, knowledge of aging topics and community resources, rural-specific barriers, and provider communication.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- Results reveal a high priority for increasing education for caregivers about a range of topics, including anxiety, depression, Alzheimer’s disease, and health behavior change.
- Interest in education about community resources complements themes among barriers, such as limited knowledge of and access to community resources.
- Initiatives such as Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Programs are instrumental in addressing needs identified by informal caregivers of older adults.