Geriatric Training Priorities and Barriers among Health Care Professionals in a Rural and Remote State

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1. INTRODUCTION

• Despite growing numbers of health care consumers aged 65 and older, the United States faces a shortage of health care providers with expertise and training in geriatric care.

• Programs such as Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Programs (GWEPs) may address gaps in geriatric health care through training and partnerships with health care professionals.

• The assessment of provider priorities, needs, and barriers comprises critical first steps in developing and implementing strategies to improve geriatric care.

2. OBJECTIVES

• To characterize geriatric health care providers, their caseloads, and training needs in a rural and remote state.

• To understand priorities among training topics and barriers to accessing formal geriatric training opportunities.

3. METHODS

Recruitment

• Participants were recruited from attendees of the 2018 Wyoming Conference on Aging who self-identified as geriatric health care providers.

Materials & Instruments

• A paper-and-pencil Needs Assessment Survey was developed by the Wyoming Center on Aging.

• Participants rated their interest in a variety of geriatric educational topics (1 = “none” to 4 = “strong”) and indicated (“yes/no”) whether they had encountered a list of barriers to attending geriatric trainings.

Analysis

• Analyses were conducted using SPSS version 24.

• Descriptive analyses were used to characterize participants, geriatric caseload, current formal training, areas of need, and barriers to accessing formal training in geriatrics.

4. RESULTS

Participant Characteristics

• Self-identified health care providers (n = 83) represented multiple counties in Wyoming.

• A majority held Baccalaureate (n = 36, 43.4%) or Master’s (n = 22, 26.5%) degrees.

• Participants largely represented nursing (n = 24, 28.9%) and mental health (n = 17, 20.5%) disciplines, most frequently in a primary care setting (n = 25, 30.1%).

• Most participants (n = 60, 72.3%) characterized 75-100% of their patients as aged 65 or older.

Geriatric Training

• Less than half (n = 33, 39.8%) had received formal training (e.g., fellowship) in geriatrics.

• Nearly half (n = 38, 45.8%) had received some support or training from the Wyoming GWEP.

• Participants rated their interest in a variety of geriatric training topics. Alzheimer’s disease, anxiety and depression, and ethics emerged as areas of highest interest (see Figure 1).

• Most frequently endorsed barriers to accessing geriatric training included distance, travel expense, cost of training, and time constraints (see Figure 2).

5. CONCLUSIONS

• Results of this needs assessment are consistent with national trends in which professionals with little formal training in geriatrics provide services to growing numbers of older adult patients.

• These results underscore the need for continued support of programs that facilitate geriatric trainings, such as GWEPs, as well as innovative training opportunities and delivery methods.

• This sample represents a unique population of providers who attended a conference, despite the barriers to accessing such trainings. Future research could examine facilitators to attending conferences and similar training opportunities.