

Session 4080 (Symposium)

FAMILY CAREGIVING DISRUPTED BY COVID-19: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES THROUGH RESILIENCE AND FLEXIBILITY

Chair: Mary Wyman Discussant: Laura Wray

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been global and pervasive – yet only partially understood. Older adults and their family caregivers have experienced profound and unprecedented challenges as a result of COVID-19. This symposium features research on these disruptions and the creative adaptations undertaken in response. Four presentations present a variety of geographic regions, caregiving settings, and research focal points. Avidor and Ayalon present findings from interviews with family caregivers of residents in long-term care, highlighting the issues faced as a result of dramatic shifts in policy and procedures in support of pandemic infection control. Gum and colleagues focused on how service access has changed for community-dwelling older adults and their families during the pandemic, and how agencies may best leverage the flexibility of caregivers to adapt service provision. Boucher et al. compare the challenges faced by family caregivers during COVID-19 with those faced during a natural disaster, and highlight unique differences in service access for caregivers of military veterans. Finally, Ko and co-authors share their experience with the implementation of a technology intervention to reduce caregiver stress as part of a research trial, and how the protocol adjustments necessitated by COVID-19 revealed the unique potential of such technologies to support caregivers under isolated conditions. The presenters will focus on themes of resilience and lessons learned for health care systems, service agencies, and society to best support family caregivers in challenging circumstances moving forward.

DISASTER CAREGIVING: CAREGIVERS NEGOTIATING STORMS AND COVID-19 FOR VETERANS AND NON-VETERANS ON THE GULF COAST

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Natural disasters and COVID-19 likely add complexity to caregiving efforts, yet little is known about these effects. We will discuss our findings exploring additional needs and challenges experienced by caregivers during hurricanes, floods, and COVID focused on US Gulf Coast states. We interviewed caregivers of both Veterans (n=13) and non-Veterans (n=11). The presentation will include an overview of 1) types of resources needed or used related to storms and to COVID, including social support and access to information for both emergency planning and recovery; 2) caregiver experience before, during, and after the disaster including psychological effects on caregivers and addressing special health needs; 3) comparisons of challenges during storms versus COVID including emotional impact and access to health

and specialty care; and 4) additional resources used by caregivers of Veterans. We will also address how these data are informing national caregiver support programs.

PANDEMIC DEPLOYMENT OF A SMARTHEALTH TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE STRESS IN DEMENTIA FAMILY CAREGIVERS

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Caregiving stress from repetitive and heavy caregiving workloads can trigger poor emotional health, such as stress, anxiety, and depression, leading to higher caregiver mortality rates. Interest in technology-based interventions for this population has increased among researchers due to availability, acceptability, and flexibility compared to in-person services, especially now, during an unprecedented pandemic. Our study focuses on in-home SmartHealth technologies for caregivers of persons with Alzheimer's Disease and related dementias, delivered using Ecological Momentary Assessment and a novel acoustic monitoring, mood recognition, and self-learning recommendation system. The system provides mindfulness-based stress management in response to interpersonal conflict in real-time. We will report challenges and solutions of creating and deploying a SmartHealth system for older adults in their home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Potential effects of this system on caregivers' emotional health are also examined. Findings suggest SmartHealth technologies may assist caregiving populations adapt and thrive in a new, more isolated normal.

THE CHALLENGES FACED BY LONG-TERM CARE RESIDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES DURING COVID-19

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The present research aims to examine the effects of protective measures due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) within long-term care (LTC) settings on the residents and their family members. Open-ended qualitative interviews were conducted with 14 family members of older adults who resided in LTC settings during the first wave of the pandemic in Israel. The first theme identified is Rupture, including physical disconnect; the disruption in routine treatment to residents; and decline in the satisfaction with the setting. The second theme is Response, including sharing viewpoints and involvement in decision making, as well as an intense ambivalence shared by family members. Our findings highlight the distress caused to residents and family members by the isolation and restrictions in LTC settings during the pandemic, and underscore values and priorities that are central to them and their family members, including maintaining