

Nursing Care of Informal Family Caregivers

Alayna Kent

Abstract

Background: There are an estimated 6.5 million Americans age 65 and older who are currently living with Alzheimer's dementia. A large majority of these individuals receive care from a nonprofessional family caregiver, typically in the home setting. It is well documented that family caregivers of dementia patients experience many unique challenges. These challenges provide valuable opportunities for nurses to provide helpful interventions to aid this vulnerable population.

Method: An integrated review of the recent literature was conducted, and articles were chosen by a method modeled after the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flowsheet. The research was then analyzed for themes and topics related to the most significant issues family caregivers face and what evidenced-based interventions to address these challenges exist.

Results: The identified areas with which caregivers struggle the most include managing the psychological and behavioral symptoms of dementia, dealing with ambiguous and anticipatory grief, feelings of isolation and unpreparedness, and physical health problems. Evidence-based interventions for these major issues include screening caregivers for the effects of caregiver burden and stress, teaching caregivers mindfulness-based interventions, encouraging mutuality between the caregiver and care-recipient, teaching strategies based on cognitive-behavioral therapeutic techniques, and connecting caregivers with resources.

This review illustrated the need for further research to be conducted on the effectiveness of nurse-specific interventions on supporting this vulnerable population, especially within acute-care settings.

Research Question and Background

Background:

- By the year 2050, the population of Americans over 65 years of age is expected to increase from **58 million to 88 million** (Alzheimer's Association, 2022).
- A vast majority of individuals who require daily assistance with activities of daily living receive care from informal family caregivers, usually spouses or children.
- Family caregivers are often responsible for assisting the person with dementia with activities of daily living, providing emotional and practical support, ensuring the safety of the person with dementia, and managing their physical health care.
- The Alzheimer's Association (2022) identifies informal family caregivers of dementia patients as a vulnerable population

Research Questions:

- What are the major issues facing family caregivers of dementia patients?
- How can nurses in inpatient settings support high-risk and vulnerable family caregivers of dementia patients?
- What interventions exist that nurses can use to support this population?

Methods

• The literature using a flow-sheet based method included in the PRISMA statement for reporting systematic reviews that evaluate health care interventions as published by the BMJ (Liberati et al., 2009).

• Boolean-style operators with search terms relevant to the research question were used to identify relevant literature within a large library database of medical and psychological peer-reviewed journals as operated by Liberty University.

• The original search terms were "caregiver," "family," "nurse," "intervention," and "dementia." This search returned 6,469 results. The terms "caregiver," "symptoms or challenge," "issue," "family," "child or spouse," "dementia," "nursing and nurse," and "intervention," not "nursing home" were then searched (Fig. 1).

• Then, terms and Boolean operators "child or spouse" and "nurse not nursing home" were removed due to the return of irrelevant and limited articles. The search was then limited to articles published or updated between January 1st, 2019, and January 1st, 2022 to ensure relevancy. Lastly, they were limited to those published in peer-reviewed scholarly journals with full text available online (for ease of use).

- This final search returned 1,257 results on the database tool. (Fig. 1)
- 10 articles were then chosen according to study-specific inclusion criteria

Figure 1- Literature Flowsheet

This flowsheet illustrates the process of choosing the literature included in the study, modeled after the PRISMA flowsheet (Liberati et al., 2009).

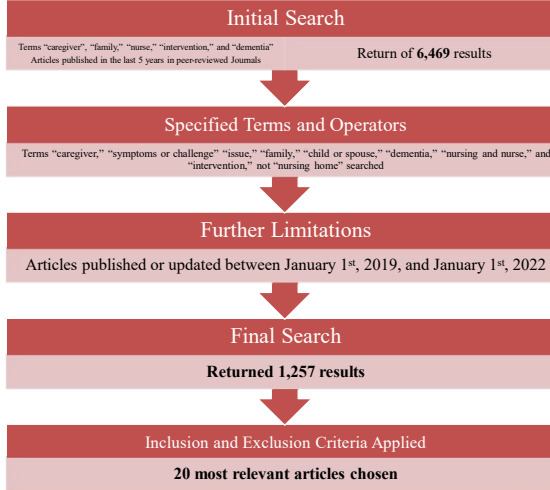


Image 2. "Woman Holding a Blood Pressure Cuff" by Vlada Karpovich is in the Public Domain, CC0

Image 1. "Two Adult Women Beside Each Other" by Andrea Piacquadio is in the Public Domain, CC0



Figure 2. Results
This figure represents the major results of the conducted study

Significant difficulties of caregiving

Burden and Responsibility related to Behavioral and Psychological Symptoms

Ambiguous and Anticipatory Grief

Isolation and Unpreparedness

Physical Health Problems

Possible nursing interventions

Screening methods for burden and stress

Teaching mindfulness-based interventions to caregivers

Encouraging mutuality between caregiver and care recipient

Connecting caregivers with psychoeducation and interprofessional resources

Results

Conclusions:

An integrated review of the most recent literature on interventions to support caregivers of dementia patients reflects **(8) key ideas and interventions** that can be incorporated into nursing practice.

Although this review was limited to twenty of the most recently published articles, the included literature supports that caregivers struggle the most with 4 specific aspects of the caregiving experience. These are:

- (1) Managing the burden and responsibilities of caregiving (especially when the care recipient experiences the behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia) tend to struggle with
- (2) Ambiguous and anticipatory grief
- (3) Isolation and unpreparedness
- (4) Physical health problems (related to the stress of caregiving)

Nurses should be aware of evidence-based interventions that are in place to manage and assist with these major issues among caregivers of dementia patients, including

- (1) Screening caregivers for the effects of caregiver burden and stress
- (2) Teaching caregivers' mindfulness-based interventions,
- (3) Encouraging mutuality between the caregiver and care-recipient, using and teaching interventions based on cognitive-behavioral techniques, and
- (4) Connecting caregivers with psychoeducation and other multi-professional resources

Future Work

This integrated review of the literature revealed the need for further research to be conducted into the significance of nurse-specific interventions for caregivers. Research to address this gap could include:

- Interventions should be implemented within hospital acute care units that frequently see geriatric dementia patients
- Utilize questionnaires for caregivers of dementia patients that accompany dementia patients to inpatient hospital units
- Using test-post-test design, educate inpatient nurses on risk factors and proposed interventions, then use interview or questionnaires to assess caregiver stress and burden

References

Alzheimer's Association. (2022). *2022 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures*. <https://www.alz.org/media/documents/alzheimers-facts-and-figures.pdf>

Karpovich, V. (2020). *Woman holding a blood pressure cuff*, photograph, retrieved from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/woman-holding-a-blood-pressure-cuff-5790823/>, Creative Commons License CC0.

Piacquadio, A. (2020). *Two adult women beside each other*, photograph, retrieved from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/two-adult-women-beside-each-other-3768114/>, Creative Commons License CC0.

For complete list of references for the integrated review and a matrix of sources, follow QR code below:

