

Emotional issues after a stroke



Bridgepoint Stroke Education Series

Learning Objectives

- Describe the adjustments patients and caregivers have in the rehab setting
- Give examples of 3 ways to maximize recovery
- List different emotions related to stroke
- Recognize the signs and symptoms of depression and the role for treatment
- List causes of caregiver stress and symptoms of caregiver burnout

Overview

- Adjusting to the hospital and rehab unit
- Common emotional changes and challenges
- How to cope with emotions
- The caregiver experience
- Q & A

Patient experience of adjusting to hospital

- New environment
- New faces
- Independence promoted
- Managing personal space
- Managing your time
- Adjusting to therapy

Manage expectations

- Review your orientation guide provided upon admission
- Get educated about
 - length of stay
 - recovery process
 - goal settings
 - family meetings and discharge planning
- Expect to experience varying emotions. Your social worker/spiritual care/psychiatrist can assist with addressing these
- Write questions down and answers provided

Coping strategies

- Explore your surroundings; the better you know the environment, the less overwhelming it is
- Remember that recovery does not often occur as fast as you would like it to
- Remember that recovery is your primary focus at this time and it requires patience and positivity if you can manage it
- Create a schedule of things you can do to occupy your time

Coping Strategies Cont'd

- Remember that laughing relaxes the body and subsequently reduces stress
- Maintain as much independence as you can
- Take breaks and rest often
- Try and reduce external stresses by asking various
- Supports to take on different tasks for you such as managing finances
- Get to know staff members and write down their contact info

Adjusting to Hospital – Caregiver Experience

- You are adjusting to a new routine which involves visiting a loved one in hospital which may or may not be easily accessible
- You are concerned about who is caring for your loved one and what occurs when you are not with them
- You are adjusting to changes in your loved one and you may be struggling with how to cope

Educate yourself and manage expectations

- Get to know your loved one's team members
- Ask about
 - length of stay
 - recovery process
 - goal settings
 - family meetings and discharge planning
- Write down questions asked and answers provided
- Read about stroke and obtain any literature possible (remember that strokes impact people differently)

Coping strategies

- Share visits to the hospital with other supports such as friends and family to avoid burnout
- Discuss visiting schedule with loved one to help manage expectations of your loved one and avoid feelings of guilt
- Encourage your loved one to be independent as possible
- Provide your contact information in a visible part of your loved one's room to provide you with comfort
- Practice self-care

Common emotional reactions/changes

- Confused/overwhelmed
- Worried/anxiety
- Angry
- Frustrated “Why me?”
- Not caring what happens
- Embarrassed/guilty
- Depression or sadness

Emotional lability

- Sudden moments of laughing or crying
- no obvious reason nor control
- Doesn't match feelings or mood
- Passes in minutes
- Improves with time and brain recovery

Managing emotional lability

Family and friends can:

- Check in, find out cause for upset
- Distract
- Call his/her name
- Ask a question
- Educate others that this may happen

Depression after a stroke

- 1/3 of people will experience symptoms of depression
- Can develop in first three months and up to two years
- Result of area of the brain where stroke damage occurred
- Emotional response to challenges, uncertainty
- Personal/family history of depression, mood, anxiety disorders

Canadian Best Practice Recommendations for Stroke Care , 2013

Depression After Stroke:

- Significant/persistent
- Feeling sad, hopeless, helpless
- Irritable, frustrated, lonely
- Appetite/sleep more or less
- Withdrawn, can't get going
- Thoughts of death and suicide

Coping with emotional challenges

Build support:

- Seek encouragement from team, family, positives
- Try not to isolate yourself, be engaged, daily routine
- Celebrate “small victories”

Get informed:

- Ask questions/ talk to your therapists
- The more you know, the better equipped
- Family/friends will know what to expect

Coping with emotional changes/challenges

Be patient and positive:

- Emotional recovery takes time
- Your feelings are a natural and common reaction
- Its normal to have good and bad days

Take time to grieve:

- Its okay to express sorrow, cry, reminisce
- It may allow you to better accept change, move forward
- Sometimes it is more stressful to keep feelings inside

Talk to someone/get help:

- Loved ones, Other patients, Social worker, Spiritual care
- Physicians, psychiatrists

Emotional impact following stroke: The Caregiver Experience

- The informal caregiver role can be very demanding, challenging and rewarding
- May experience many of the same feelings experienced by the stroke survivor such as grief, guilt, anger, fear, frustration, loneliness
- Caregivers are at a heightened risk of depress (30% - 60%)
- Feeling overwhelmed/lacking confidence in ability to manage your new role, new information, competing roles and life demands
- Role confusion, role reversal
- Caregiver burnout

“Stroke impacts on the whole family, not just the person who has suffered the stroke”

Dr Elizabeth Gilchrist,
neuropsychologist,
Glenrose Hospital, Edmonton

What is caregiver burnout?

Caregiver burnout is the intensive progression of a caregiver's stresses - physical, psychological, emotional, financial, social and spiritual - to the point that one feels totally "burned out" – overwhelmed and unable to cope

What causes caregiver burnout?

- Lack of self-care
- Unrealistic expectations
- Unreasonable demands
- Lack of effective coping strategies

Many caregivers cannot recognize when they are suffering burnout and eventually get to the point where they cannot function. They may minimize or ignore concerns from others

What are the symptoms of caregiver burnout?

- Withdrawal from friends, family, and other loved ones
- Loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed
- Feeling blue, irritable, hopeless, and helpless
- Changes in appetite, weight, or both
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Getting sick more often
- Feelings of wanting to hurt yourself or the person for whom you are caring
- Emotional and physical exhaustion
- Irritability

Tips for Caregivers

- Choose to take charge of your life, and don't let your loved one's illness or disability always take center stage.
- Remember to be good to yourself. Love, honor and value yourself. Self care is an absolute necessity for caregivers
- Watch for signs of depression and don't delay in getting professional help when you need it.
- Know your limits and do a "reality-check" of your personal situation.
- When people offer to help, accept the offer and suggest specific things they can do.
- Manage expectations. Educate yourself about your loved one's condition.

Tips for Caregivers

- Seek support from other caregivers. There is great strength in knowing that you are not alone.
- Stay healthy by eating right and getting plenty of exercise and sleep.
- Accept your feelings. Having negative feelings -- such as frustration or anger -- about your responsibilities or the person for whom you are caring is normal. It does not mean you are a bad person or a bad caregiver.
- Grieve for your losses, then allow yourself to dream new dreams.

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