PII-26: STRESSORS OF FAMILY CAREGIVERS OF WOUNDED WARRIORS

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Abstract:
Introduction: The number of service members surviving severe combat trauma is increasing. Major injuries sustained are life-changing for service members but also dramatically affects the family, too. Family members who suddenly become caregivers are often in need of assistance in coping with this new lifestyle. As the military families assimilate into the civilian population, it is important for healthcare providers to recognize these caregivers and the stresses that they undergo. Since a healthy family caregiver is able to provide better care, caring for caregivers, known as 'hidden patients,' benefits both the caregivers and those for whom they care. Meeting the needs specific to military family caregivers can be considered a means of caring for our wounded warriors. A focus group was undertaken to identify stressors and difficulties specific to military family caregivers of wounded warriors. The intent was to determine what adaptations need to be made to a current stress management program so that it meets the needs of military family caregivers.

Method(s): The focus group included 3 wives and 2 mothers. The injuries of their warriors included 3rd degree burns of 30% of the body, and amputations. Caregivers were asked to describe their experiences and to identify what was stressful to them. Qualitative analysis of their comments was undertaken to clarify specific stressors.

Results: Many concerns of the military caregivers were similar to those of other caregivers. These included uncertainty, loss, role changes, relationship changes, and guilt. Stressors specific to the military which need added emphasis were loss, anger management, a need to know the possible trajectory of long-term outcomes of injury as well as dealing with the loss and adjustment that the wounded warrior experiences. Military caregivers displayed need of a particular manner of approach that touched their 'military identity.'
Discussion & Conclusions: Stress is stress, no matter who experiences it. However, dealing with the stressors involved in particular situations is helpful. Family caregivers of our wounded warriors, who take on their roles unselfishly and have a proud tradition of self-reliance, are vulnerable and need to be recognized and assisted in their caregiving roles.

Abstract History:
This abstract has not been presented or accepted for presentation in whole or in part at the SNRS or other scientific meeting.

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