Informal Caregivers Indicate Stress, Reward, and Need for Access to Resources

The National Poll on Healthy Aging, conducted by the University of Michigan Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation, surveyed 148 individuals (7% of a nationally representative sample) between ages 50 and 80 who take care of a loved one older than 65 with dementia.

Although 78% of those surveyed reported that caregiving was stressful, 85% called it a rewarding experience. In addition, 45% rated it as “very rewarding” compared to 19% who called it “very stressful.” Ninety-one percent reported that caregiving caused them to think about their own future care needs; however, 66% of dementia caregivers say that their duties currently interfere with their own life and work. Only 25% of those surveyed had taken advantage of resources to help caregivers.

Although caregiving can be rewarding and may help encourage caregivers to plan for their own future needs, it can be a stressful experience, and many caregivers who want access to outside resources for caregivers do not currently have access to such resources. One observation of the study is that health care providers should routinely ask patients if they serve as a caregiver to a loved one, so providers can identify and address needs and concerns during the caregiver’s own appointments.

Poll Finds That 83% of Older Adults Will Be Negatively Impacted by Health Insurance Tax

A national poll released by the Better Medicare Alliance surveyed 2,037 Medicare-eligible older adults and revealed that 83% of Medicare beneficiaries said they would be negatively impacted if their premiums were to rise by $245 as projected due to annual health insurance premiums.

The tax, originally established by the Affordable Care Act for 2017, was previously suspended by Congress; however, the tax is set to be reinstated at a higher annual level ($14.3 billion) in 2018 if Congress does not act to delay the health insurance tax.

According to Allyson Y. Schwartz, Better Medicare Alliance President and CEO, “This survey shows that not only are seniors facing a major hit, even worse, the majority are grossly unaware without any opportunity to prepare or make their voice heard. Costly premiums would put the high-quality, comprehensive health coverage Medicare Advantage provides financially out of reach for millions of Americans.”


Study Offers Insight on Identifying Individuals With Increased Risk of Alzheimer’s Disease

A delayed neurological response to processing the written word could be an indicator that a patient with mild memory problems is at an increased risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease (AD), according to a study led by the University of Birmingham’s School of Psychology and Centre for Human Brain Health and conducted in collaboration with the Universities of Kent and California. The study, published in Neuroimage Clinical, used an electroencephalogram to examine the brain activity of 25 individuals to measure how quickly they processed words shown to them on computer screens. Patients were a mix of healthy older adults, patients with mild cognitive impairment (MCI),
and patients with MCI who had developed AD within 3 years of diagnosis of MCI.

The purpose of the study was to investigate individuals’ abilities to process language in the period between the initial appearance of symptoms of AD to its full development. The study found that brain response to a written word is abnormal in individuals who develop AD compared to those who do not. This abnormal response could be used to identify patients likely to develop AD, and could potentially allow for early pharmacological intervention for patients who mention concern about memory issues. The researchers hope to test their findings on a larger population of patients in the United Kingdom to determine whether these abnormalities in brain response are specific predictors of AD or general markers of dementia in the temporal lobe.


Greater Neighborhood Cohesion May Help Prevent Self-Neglect in U.S. Chinese Older Adults

According to a study published in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society, increasing neighborhood cohesion may enhance self-neglect prevention and intervention in U.S. Chinese older adults. Self-neglect is the inability to perform essential self-care tasks, and is more prevalent in U.S. Chinese older adults than in Black and White older adults. It is related to greater risk of medical comorbidities and mortality in older adults.

In this study, more than 3,000 U.S. Chinese adults older than 60 were interviewed. Five phenotypes of self-neglect including hoarding, poor personal hygiene, need for home repair, unsanitary conditions, and inadequate utilities; and measured neighborhood cohesion were assessed. The study found that greater neighborhood cohesion was associated with lower risk of overall self-neglect, poor personal hygiene, and need for home repair, but not hoarding, unsanitary conditions, and inadequate utilities. The authors hope that the study’s findings will support policymakers and community organizations to encourage greater neighborhood cohesion and thus prevent self-neglect among older adults.


Study Finds That Nursing Workforce Is Becoming More Diverse and Educated

More male nurses, nurses of varying races and ethnicities, and
nurses with bachelor’s degrees are entering the workforce, according to a study published in Nursing Outlook by researchers from NYU Rory Meyers College of Nursing. The study used nursing workforce data from 13 states. Four cohorts of nurses were surveyed in 2006, 2009, 2012, and 2016, capturing data on approximately 5,000 nurses who were newly licensed during the prior year, to uncover changes in the workforce throughout the 10-year period.

During this period, significantly more men became part of the workforce, growing from 8.8% in 2005 to 13.6% in 2015. Ethnic/racial diversity also increased, as the percentage of White nurses decreased from 78.9% in 2008 to 73.8% in 2015. In addition, nurses in 2015 were significantly more likely to have a BSN or higher (48.5%) when compared to nurses in 2005 (36.6%). Finally, there was an increase of approximately 7% in regard to nurses’ reports on collegial relations between nurses and physicians.

These changes are in accordance with a 2010 report by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) that provided recommendations on how nurses can best advance the nation’s health. The recommendations included increasing diversity and education levels among nurses. Although the nursing workforce is moving in the direction of the IOM report, the study results suggest that it is still below goals of the report and other recommendations. Policy changes that could support achievement of the IOM recommendations include scholarship support for nursing students as well as employer-provided benefits for education, which would reduce the financial barriers and possibility of accruing student debt to become a nurse.


Training in Prisons May Promote Compassion Among Nursing Students

Nursing students trained alongside an interprofessional health care team comprising nurses, physicians, physician assistants, and physical therapists at a 4,000-inmate, all-male, maximum security prison in a clinical experience created in 2004 by Mary Bouchard, PhD, Assistant Professor at Jefferson College of Nursing. A total of 186 student surveys from 10 years of the program were analyzed to observe how students’ perceptions changed throughout the course of their 5- to 6-week rotation.

The purpose of the clinical experience was to introduce nursing students to individuals in a prison who required health care, so that students could practice skills such as cultural sensitivity, communication, and providing nonjudgmental care, which they would be able to transfer to their future practices. The surveys indicated that the experience challenged students’ preconceived notions about prisons and promoted compassion for all individuals, regardless of their circumstances. In addition, students reported positive results from the experience.