Case
Mrs. Jones is a 65-year-old woman with stage 6 Alzheimer's disease, currently in the hospital after fracturing her hip. Prior to hospitalization, she lived with her adult son and family, who are now expressing concern about bringing her back home because they feel increasingly burdened. They all work and her ability to independently perform her ADLs has been impacted. The OT working with Mrs. Jones wants to help the family, but is unsure whether she will be able to alleviate some of the caregivers’ feelings of burden.

What is the effect of OT on reducing caregiver burden?

Because caring for individuals with dementia can be a difficult and stressful task, this CAT analyzes what role occupational therapy has in addressing caregiver burden.

1. Ask: Research Question
   In caregivers of individuals with dementia, what is the effect of OT services on caregiver burden compared with caregivers who do not receive OT services?

2. Acquire: Search Terms
   Patient/Client group: Dementia
   AND Caregivers
   Intervention: Occupational Therapy
   Comparison:
   Outcome(s): Burden

2a. Acquire: Selected Articles
   Gitlin et al. (2010): Randomized control trial (RCT) that examined the effect of the Advancing Caregiver Training (ACT) program on managing distressing behaviors in 272 patients with dementia and their caregivers.
   Gitlin et al. (2008): Randomized pilot study that examined the effectiveness of tailored activity programs (TAP) on reducing dementia-related behaviors and caregiver burden in 60 dyads of patients with dementia and their caregivers.
   Graff et al. (2006): RCT that examined the effectiveness of community-based OT on the daily functioning of patients with dementia and their caregivers’ sense of competence in 135 patients and their primary caregivers.
   Lam et al. (2010): RCT that examined the effect of OT case management on reducing caregiver burden in 201 patients and caregivers.

2b. Appraise: Study Quality
   Gitlin et al. (2010): Suggestive: Large sample size, randomized, assessors blind to allocation. Voluntary participation, caregivers with high upset were purposefully targeted.
   Graff et al. (2006): Preponderant: Randomized, assessors blind to allocation, high follow up rate at 12 weeks. Non-representative sample. Used competence to measure burden.
   Lam et al. (2010): Inconclusive: Randomized, administration by blind research assistant. Small sample size, low caregiver follow-through.

3. Appraise: Study Results
   Taken together, these studies suggest that occupational therapists may provide beneficial interventions that reduce caregiver burden. Lam et al. (2009) found that OT did not provide statistically significant results to reduce caregiver burden, however, the other three studies showed positive results and were stronger study designs. Furthermore, none of the studies reported adverse effects. Additional studies should examine different OT services for caregivers.

4. Apply: Conclusions for Practice
   In addressing the clinical scenario, the majority of the studies suggest it would be beneficial for the OT to provide occupational therapy intervention to the family and address the areas of caregiver concern. The participants in the study group were similar to Mrs. Jones and the intervention may help her family more effectively care for her. Furthermore current practice should include the intervention as there is strong evidence supporting its ability to effectively reduce caregiver burden.

References

Reviewers:
Danielle Alvarez, Erin Corbin, Shruti Gadkari, Ashley Halle, Jacodynn Johnson, Janet Larsen, Jennifer Liberson
Date completed: April 27, 2011

✓ Yes: Occupational Therapy is effective for reducing caregiver burden in caregivers of individuals with dementia.