



(S47) COMPARISON OF MS FAMILY CAREGIVER NEEDS AND CHARACTERISTICS  
IN TWO CLINICAL SETTINGS

**BACKGROUND:** MS family caregivers spend a considerable amount of time caring for afflicted family members and report an overall decrease in their quality of life. Caregivers require support services to manage their emotional, physical, and financial burden as they coordinate and provide care. The literature calls for consistent evidence-based practices that will enable health care practitioners to educate and support MS caregivers so that those caregivers may 1) continue their caregiving role and 2) maintain their own physical and emotional health and quality of life.

**PURPOSE:** To identify and compare family caregiver needs and characteristics between two samples, our descriptive pilot study included a voluntary self-reported survey conducted among a convenience population of caregivers at two Baltimore clinics in close proximity: University of Maryland MS Center (UM) and Baltimore Veterans Administration MS Center (VA).

**METHODS:** We defined MS family caregivers as spouse, relative, or significant other living in the home. The survey included a) questions to help improve communication between the health care provider-family caregiver, and b) a self assessment section designed to measure indices of emotional and physical distress. We assessed caregiver knowledge about MS, caregiver education level, resources utilized (e.g., assistive devices, use of veteran caregiver resources, home health aides), and MS patient symptoms. The survey also inquired about the caregiver's health and the family burden.

**RESULTS:** There were no significant differences between the caregiver populations. Both populations of caregivers were predominantly white female spouses over the age of 45 with at least a high school education. 75% were spousal caregivers while 88% (UM) or 96% (VA) have provided care for >1 year. More than half of our caregivers work outside the home while 26% of VA caregivers work full-time compared to 40% of UM caregivers. 40-50% of households utilized additional, paid caregiver support with the majority requiring extra help 16 hours or more/week. More than half of both populations expressed the need for more emotional and peer support, more physical support, more knowledge about caregiver support services, and more educational opportunities about MS care and community resources.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Greater than 50% of caregivers reported their care recipients were wheelchair dependent, indicating more advanced disease in their care recipients, and thus, more hours of caregiving. We will utilize the data from this study to design and implement needs-based caregiving programs in both centers that will be generalizable to the family caregiver population, be it veteran or civilian.

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