

Special Article

Family Caregivers for Older Adults with a Tracheostomy during Hospitalization: Psychological Impacts and Support

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Abstract

The proportion of older adults with a tracheostomy is dramatically increasing in hospitals. Although care for older adults would be supervised by physicians and nurses, they also need to be supported by their family members during hospitalization. Family caregivers often provide care for their older adults. Consequently, this has an impact on the caregiver such as inadequate sleep, fatigue, reduction of social interaction, and insufficient income. Meanwhile, psychological impacts also occur as a result of the caregiving burden. These are mainly negative impacts expressed in terms of stress, depression, and a feeling of abandonment by other family members. Nonetheless, caregiving can also be viewed as a positive experience as well such as a sense of giving back to older family members who have cared for them, improved ability involving tracheostomy care, building a good relationship, and enhancing capability of expressing empathy. However, family caregivers who have negative psychological impacts of caregiving should be supported by healthcare professionals regarding tracheostomy care. This could reduce stress and prevent depression along with enhancing the quality of life among family caregivers of older adults with a tracheostomy.

Keywords: caregivers, family, older adults, psychological impact, support, tracheostomy

Introduction

The number of tracheotomies performed among older adults is dramatically increasing in the hospitals. A study of Liu et al. (2017a) indicated that 76.2% of patients who underwent tracheostomy in respiratory care wards were mainly older adults with an average age being 63-74 years. This is attributed to indications of tracheostomies such as prolonged mechanical ventilation, respiratory distress, and airway protection (Bergeron and Audet, 2016, Vargas et al., 2015). Furthermore, a tracheostomy tube can impact the ability to communicate. This makes older adults feel frustrated due to inability to communicate and feeling of helplessness (Sherlock et al., 2009). This affects self-esteem and quality of life of older adults with a tracheostomy (Freeman-Sanderson et al., 2018).

In addition, older adults need care while having a tracheostomy tube, assistance in performing daily activities, and observation of the symptoms related to the tracheostomy tube as well. Therefore, family caregivers have to care and extremely support them together with physicians, nurses, and another healthcare professional during hospitalization. Family caregivers are often involved in care for older adults with a tracheostomy in hospital. They are mainly involved in tasks including communicating with doctors and nurses, cleaning and dressing the patient, feeding the patient, procuring medication and other supplies, administering oral medications, changing position, back care, intra-facility transportation of the patients for investigations, collecting reports, and providing physiotherapy (Bhalla et al., 2014).