

iSupport Caregivers Project

The Seniors' Health Strategic Clinical Network (SCN) has supported a research grant to investigate an online support tool for family caregivers and its impact on caregiver burden and health. This 2-year grant, led by principal investigator Dr Jayna Holroyd-Leduc at the University of Calgary, has been funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

Family caregivers are an important part of the health care system, and these caregivers require support to help deal with the physical and emotional costs associated with care giving. However, there appears to be a gap between what research evidence suggests is needed to help support family caregivers and what is actually provided. Family caregivers of persons with dementia are a particular group to target for more supports, given the increasing number of persons with dementia and the high level of care that is often required. Currently 44 million people globally are estimated to be living with dementia, with this number predicted to almost double by 2030. Family caregivers provide a significant proportion of the care currently provided to older Canadians with dementia.

The objective of this proposal is to implement and evaluate an evidence-informed online support tool customized for Canadian caregivers of persons with dementia. Specifically, this project will explore the potential value of this online support tool that incorporates evidence-informed interactive caregiver self-efficacy and self-management modules (iSupport), recently developed by the World Health Organization. Self-efficacy and self-management strategies and tools can be an effective way to decrease caregiver burden. The iSupport modules will be embedded into a currently available local Alberta website provided by the Alzheimer Society of Alberta and Northwest Territories (www.asantcafe.ca).

The research team brings together international researchers and a broad array of knowledge users, including the Alzheimer Society, as partners in the research process. The research will test the usability of the online support tool (iSupport) with family caregivers. The iSupport modules will be revised based on this feedback, ensuring that any potential barriers to use are addressed. This will be followed by a randomized controlled trial to determine the impact of iSupport on caregiver outcomes such as burden and health.

The project may serve as a model for implementation and evaluation of evidence-informed online supports targeted directly towards patients and families. Ultimately, this research may lead to improving evidence-based practices in supporting caregivers of persons with dementia across Canada.