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Neuroscience
Advocate Condell Medical Center and Advocate Christ Medical Center

Introduction
In the United States, there are nearly 800,000 strokes per year. Stroke is the #1 cause of adult disability. In addition, approximately one-third of stroke survivors experience depression and decreased quality of life after their stroke. Stroke support groups offer social support and have been shown to increase functional outcomes, increase the survivor’s sense of self-efficacy, and improve self-esteem. Unfortunately, in-person stroke support groups were unavailable due to social distancing and stay-at-home orders instituted during the peak of Covid-19.

The first virtual support group was held in July 2020 and has continued to be held monthly. Topics included recreational programs such as golf, boxing, cycling, and sailing. In addition, multiple research studies needing stroke survivor participants have been presented. An average of fifteen participants attended each month.

Rationale
Support groups originated from psych/mental illness as far back as the 1800s, becoming more well known with Alcoholics Anonymous. Support groups offer:
- Needed support from someone that has been through a similar situation and facing similar challenges
- Let the survivor know they’re not alone
- Help each other through their challenges
Stoke coordinators of the IL Advocate Aurora Health system recognized that it was essential to continue to provide a support group for their stroke survivors during this time. Therefore, the AAH-IL stroke coordinators decided to offer a virtual monthly stroke support group.

Method
- The support group was held on the Zoom platform. The groups were facilitated by Katherine Murczek, Advocate Christ’s Stroke Program Manager and Joy Rainey, Advocate Condell’s Stroke Program Coordinator. Every month a reminder email including the link to the meeting and topic is sent out to the participants.
- To measure participants perceived benefit and satisfaction, a survey was emailed to the participants.
- The survey asked for opportunities for change or improvement and suggestions for future topics/speakers
- Some barriers of attending were also identified.

Results
- We received 36 completed surveys
- 44% answered that they had attended 4-12 months during the previous 12-month period

Conclusions
- This stroke support group has connected stroke survivors from Florida, Arizona, southern Wisconsin, and the Chicago land area. As a result, they feel they are supported and understood.
- 64% percent find the virtual support group beneficial, while 58% of those that attend an in-person support group find in-person beneficial.
- 80% would like to see the virtual support group continued.
- They continue to build a community of support and have requested that this group be continued even when in-person groups return.
- A virtual platform should be a consideration for any support group.

Implications for Practice
- The virtual stroke support group offers a way to connect to other stroke survivors during times when in-person groups were not available at the height of Covid.
- Now that some communities are offering in-person support groups, 50% prefer both in-person and virtual.
- 19% prefer virtual only, and 31% prefer in-person only.
- Some common suggestions for improvement include the following:
  - Increase the length of the group.
  - Go back to in-person.
  - Increase the frequency twice a month.
  - Increase awareness of the virtual support group.
- We are currently looking at providing a hybrid of in-person at the previous locations with an option to join virtually.

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