

Considering Health Care Needs in a Rural Parkinson Disease Community

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What is the Purpose of this Study/Review?

- The purpose of the study was to identify and understand needs of rural individuals affected by Parkinson disease (PD), including people living with PD, family members, friends, health care professionals, and social service providers.

What Is the Problem?

- PD is a common disorder that affects patient's movement, speech and other daily activities.
- There is no known cure for PD; hence, medication and behavioral interventions such as speech therapy and exercise help to manage this disease.
- In rural communities, patients with PD face additional challenges owing to a lack of access to health care specialists nearby.
- There is a need to understand what resources, needs, and barriers people living with PD have in rural communities.

What Are the Findings?

- The Wyoming Parkinson Project team was created to facilitate ongoing communication and support among a wide variety of individuals affected personally or professionally by PD in Wyoming.
- It was seen that people living with PD in this rural state had both challenges related to access to care as well as disease and treatment-related challenges.
- The rural nature of the state made these challenges increasingly difficult to manage. There were a number of innovative and creative solutions to addressing these challenges generated as well.

Who Should Care Most?

- Health care providers and specialists treating people living with PD should be aware of these issues.
- Specifically, health care physicians, neurologists, and allied health care practitioners such as pharmacists, speech language pathologists, and physical therapists practicing in rural communities should care about what their patients want and need most.

Recommendations for Action

- As a potential solution, more research on telehealth as an alternate form of delivering health care is suggested for rural individuals living with PD.
- In addition, participants cared about getting access not only to providers but also to support, information, and recommendations for addressing the identified challenges. Suggestions for future inquiry include online support groups, increased use of university experts, and enhanced services through community libraries.