Wisconsin Department of Health Services

School-Based Brain Health Curriculum

BACKGROUND

FAMILY CAREGIVERS in the United States, 26% of households providing care to someone under age 18 living in the residence. These children are providing care for family members with dementia along with their usual demands of school and other activities. Providing resources to support these families in providing that care.

However, changes to lifestyle are thought to have an impact on reducing the number of risk factors that develop dementia. Providing information about dementia and projections for the future can help to encourage healthy choices throughout the lifespan.

PREVENTION STRATEGIES

Currently, there is no cure or successful prevention strategy for Alzheimer’s and other dementias.

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GOALS FOR THE CURRICULUM

STIGMA REDUCTION

Introducing information about dementia through the school curriculum will reach more people than any other campaign. Providing an understanding of the disease will reduce the stigma attached to it due to lack of knowledge.

AWARENESS OF RISK FACTORS

Healthy lifestyle habits formed in youth can reduce individual risk for developing dementia.

DEMENTIA-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

Schools are at the heart of many communities, providing an opportunity for students, teachers, and community members to learn about dementia.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Providing opportunities for students to explore careers in health care, especially dementia care, can increase interest in pursuing a career in these types of settings.

MUSIC & MEMORIES

This non-pharmacological intervention can be used by family caregivers to provide a positive distraction for persons with dementia. It can also provide a connection with caregivers.

Support for Families

Information on dementia and family caregiving presented in class may be taken home and shared with family members, who may otherwise be unable to attend other support groups.

INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMMING

Care facilities, libraries, civic organizations, churches, and other community groups can support the delivery of dementia care.

CHILDREN ARE CAREGIVERS

Children are at the center of many communities, providing an opportunity for educators and families to recognize that children are also caregivers and provide educational opportunities for them in this important role.

RESULTS

The responses to the question, “Have you ever been alone with a person with Alzheimer’s disease or other form of dementia?” revealed that one in five students participating in the surveys have provided at least some supervision, if not primary caregiving, to a family member with dementia. Responses changed from roughly 45% responding in the negative to 85%, almost doubling the number of correct responses.

NO

1

10%

West High School responded that he or she has provided care for someone with dementia. When asked if they would recommend this curriculum to others, a student at Clark Street Community School responded, “Yes, it’s cool to know how to take care of someone in your family with dementia/Alzheimer’s.”

CLARK STREET COMMUNITY SCHOOL PILOT

In spring of 2015, the Clark Street Community School agreed to pilot the curriculum. The school is a non-traditional high school with a focus on personalization, flexibility, and community involvement. The curriculum was presented by the teacher and additional speakers and community engagement opportunities were provided to the students.

The Music and Memories™ program provided a connection to the local community where the program has been implemented. The students were able to visit people with dementia who were using the program and connect with another generation around the love of music. A music therapy utilized the class, sparking two students’ interest in becoming music therapists.

WAUSAU WEST HIGH SCHOOL PILOT

In March of 2016, the curriculum was presented to two health classes of sophomores at Wausau West High School, a traditional public high school. The material was presented in the 50-minute class period, along with a presentation by a local nursing home. Pre-tests and post-tests were completed by the 115 students in the two classes.

Questions included:

- Have you ever been alone with a person with Alzheimer’s disease or other form of dementia?
- Is dementia a normal part of aging?
- Do you think that you can do anything to reduce your risk of getting Alzheimer’s disease?

“IT'S cool to know how to take care of someone in your family with dementia/Alzheimer’s.”

Student from Clark Street Community School

CONCLUSION

Providing education on brain health, dementia, and family caregiving in the school system produces multiple benefits for individuals, families, and society. Providing awareness of lifestyle choices to reduce the risk of dementia supports individuals. Recognizing that children are also family caregivers provides opportunities for family caregiving and caring strategies.

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