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CORE Health Care Conducts Research to Evaluate the Long-Term Needs of Caregivers of Individuals with Brain Injuries

In an effort to ensure a first class discharge experience, CORE Health Care conducted a research study with family caregivers whose loved ones have discharged from their rehabilitation program. Outcome research has indicated convincingly that social and behavioral disorders after acquired brain injury (ABI) have the longest troubling effects for the individual and their family. Therefore, psychoeducational materials specifically addressing how to manage personality and behavior changes and associated difficulties of brain injury are a crucial need for family members (Willer & Linn, 1993; Ylvisaker, et al., 2007).

Research has indicated that the needs of family caregivers of individuals with an ABI involve two areas. First, they need to be well educated about community and health resources following their family member's discharge from an inpatient or residential rehabilitation facility. Second, they need help in understanding how to communicate and positively function with the brain-injured individual. Since previous research revealed that neither of these needs is met effectively, the main goal of this study was to provide rehabilitation and mental health professionals with a more thorough understanding of the experiences of family caregivers of individuals who have suffered an ABI following their discharge from a rehabilitation setting and in turn address those areas during the rehabilitation process and in a community counseling setting. Another goal was to utilize CORE's Brain Injury Family Guide DVD as a means for understanding common behavioral difficulties experienced by individuals with brain injury and to expand the effectiveness of psychoeducational tools for their caregivers.

One parent, Susan, expressed her fears and frustrations of daily caregiving for the last 11 years, "I watched the DVD, and it was a very good DVD. I saw me a few years ago and I did some of those "don't do's" because we didn't know what to do and your frustrated, your tired, your scared and you don't know what is happening in your life and your just as angry as they are. Not only did this happen to your child and that is just enough to trigger anyone but it's happening to you."

The sample consisted of ten family caregivers and two individuals with an ABI ranging from one year to eighteen years post-injury. Specific strategies to enhance validity and reliability as well as the limitations were addressed. Results indicated that individuals with an ABI experienced major changes in their personality and behavior post-injury. Additionally caregivers and their loved one experienced barriers to independence and significant lifestyle changes including moving, job loss and divorce.

Findings were presented at the International Brain Injury Association's Eighth World Congress on Brain Injury, the North American Brain Injury Society conference and the Brain Injury Association of Texas conference. Additionally, presentations to area guardians, life care planners and case managers have been conducted to ensure that the medical and mental health community is aware of the needs of this population.

CORE's next steps will be to conduct interviews with all primary caregivers six months to a year after their loved one's discharge from CORE. Richard Temple, Ph.D, V.P. of Clinical Operations stated: "This research aligns with the Commission on Accreditation for Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) outcomes standards which focus on addressing patient satisfaction with services regarding how each patient is improving or maintaining their quality of life after discharge." Furthermore, as an additional resource to caregivers, CORE has recently hired a family therapist, Shannon Hammon, MA, LMFT, to meet with families and address current and future concerns about their family's functioning while their loved one is a resident of CORE. One family member Kate expressed, "I have done an all-the-way turn on the issue of counseling. When it first happened, I said no, I can deal with it myself. I don't need someone telling me anything. I think in therapy, we learned as a family. We learned that you have to come to know them as a different person."

This research demonstrated the need for extensive collaboration between family caregivers, rehabilitation and mental health professionals. Additionally, it provided evidence of the usefulness of psychoeducational tools for caregivers including the CORE Brain Injury Family Guide. It is recommended that future research examine the relationship between rehabilitation professionals and community mental health professionals to evaluate if they are adequately serving families dealing with ABI.

Located in Dripping Springs, TX, CORE Health Care provides post-acute brain injury rehabilitation and long-term care for individuals with brain injuries, complex psychiatric disorders, autism or other special needs.

For more information about the CORE Brain Injury Family Guide, visit:
<http://www.corefamilytrainer.com>

**For more information about this particular research study, contact Nicole Harmon, Ph.D.
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