(S16) LIFE COACHING PEOPLE WITH MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS
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Background: During the last decade, life coaching has emerged as an effective tool for motivating individuals to achieve personal and professional goals. While previously used in business, psychology, and human services, life coaching has more recently been applied to assist those with chronic illness. As an example, the Center for Integrative Medicine at Duke University has pioneered a life coaching program for people with heart disease and diabetes that has proven to be effective in changing behaviors and improving health outcomes. Objectives: Based on the success of the Duke program, the Multiple Sclerosis Association of America (MSAA) developed a Life Coaching Program to help multiple sclerosis (MS) patients cope with their challenges. The program was developed with input from 1000 people with MS who requested a focus on resiliency, stress management, family issues, accepting help, managing emotion, cultivating happiness, and employment issues. Methods: MSAA's program is led by a psychologist, a certified life coach who provides individual and group coaching via toll-free teleconference, enabling participation regardless of location or degree of disability. In the first year 170 clients throughout the nation received 884 hours of life coaching. Results: Eighty-two people used individual life coaching, some for only a single session to explore a defined topic (39%) and others for multiple sessions to resolve complicated challenges (61%). Newly diagnosed people and those recently unemployed because of MS tended to engage in a longer duration of service. A sample of 16 individually coached clients who had set a combined total of 70 personal goals was surveyed; 33% of their goals were “met,” 42% were “significantly improved,” 24% were “somewhat improved,” and 1% were “unchanged.” Ninety clients participated in group coaching teleconferences. Topics included asking for help, coping with fatigue, and stress management. Participant feedback indicated that 98% of the attendees found the programs “helpful,” with 58% indicating they were “very helpful.” Conclusions: While the MSAA Life Coaching Program has been fully operational for less than a year, these preliminary data indicate its potential effectiveness for those affected by MS. MSAA continues to acquire additional data to determine the long-term effectiveness of goal-focused coaching approaches.

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